BERTINESCHEN

THE LIBERTINES

TRANSATLANTIC LIBRARY

FORTHCOMING TITLES

THE SACRED HILL

By Maurice Barres
Translated by Malcolm Cowley

PYRAMIDS AND TEMPLES

By Julius Meier-Graefe
Translated by Roger Hinks

THE MAN OF POWER

By Heinrich Mann

THE BLACK VENUS

By André Salmon
Translated by Slater Brown

THE LAST NIGHTS OF PARIS

By Philippe Soupault
Translated by William Carlos Williams

THE STORY OF LUDOLF URSLEU

By Ricarda Huch
Translated by William A. Drake

WAVES

By Count Edouard Keyserling
Translated by Arthur J. Ashton

THE LIBERTINES

HENRI DE REGNIER

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY
SLATER BROWN

THE MACAULAY COMPANY
NEW YORK MCMXXIX

COPYRIGHT, 1929, BY
THE MACAULAY COMPANY

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

FOREWORD

This novel by Henri de Régnier which was published in France under the title of "Les Rencontres de M. de Bréot" is a description of the lives and an exposition of the ideas of that 17th century group of Free Thinkers who called themselves "Libertines" and who, in the words of their famous Ninon de Lenclos believed "that a man is much to be pitied when he needs a religion to lead him, for it is a proof that his mind is narrow and his heart corrupt."

M. de Régnier's mind is not narrow, neither is his heart corrupt, and for these reasons his sympathy with his subject is genuine. But it springs, perhaps, from more general grounds. For M. de Régnier is most emphatically a man of another century, or to express it more accurately, of two other centuries—the 17th and the 18th. So profound is his affection for this past that one can describe the majority of his novels as being not only *of* these centuries, but even *by* and *for* them.

The present novel is not an exception. Its idiom, its grammar, its style are of the Grand Siècle. Even its attitude is that of the past, an attitude which though it does not deny the present, nevertheless ignores it. But though it is a novel of periwigs, of fauns, masques, fountains and melancholy gardens, its major interest is not antiquarian. For M. de Régnier being pre-eminently the poet and novelist of the Grand Siècle he is pre-eminently the poet and novelist of Love. And his Libertines herein concern themselves more ardently with that passion which is universal than with that system of ideas which is not.

Due to his preoccupation with an age when France was most completely and indubitably French, Henri de Régnier today is perhaps the most French of all living French writers. Subtle, vivacious, sensual, ironic, occasionally superficial and occasionally wicked, he possesses all those qualities which foreigners have so long associated with the Gallic race. Yes, M. de Régnier is French to the very tips of that "moustache fine et tombante," which gives so Gallic a character to his face and which his biographer, Jean de Gourmont, so much admired.

M. de Régnier (Henri-François-Joseph) was

born on the 28th of December, 1864, in the town of Honfleur on the coast of Normandy, that section of France ever-productive of literary men. Though he has been writing novels for the past thirty years and though some of them have run into thirty or forty editions, the present novel is, I believe, the first to be translated into English.

In conclusion I will add that certain passages occur in the original which might possibly, to use the phraseology of Victorian translators, "offend the more refined and delicate sensibilities of our time." I hope that in translating these passages into English I have given them that refinement and delicacy which M. de Régnier has given them in the French.

THE TRANSLATOR.

CONTENTS

PAGE

CHAPTER ONE 13

HOW MONSIEUR DE BRÉOT MADE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF MONSIEUR FLOREAU DE BERCAILLÉ

CHAPTER TWO 34

IN WHICH MONSIEUR DE BRÉOT BEHOLDS MADAME DE BLIONNE AND ENCOUNTERS MONSIEUR LE VARLON DE VERRIGNY

CHAPTER THREE 65

WHERE AND IN WHAT PECULIAR CIRCUMSTANCES MONSIEUR DE BRÉOT AGAIN ENCOUNTERED MONSIEUR LE VARLON DE VERRIGNY

CHAPTER FOUR 101

WHAT MONSIEUR HERBOU THE CONTRACTOR PURPOSED DOING AND WHAT HE PROPOSED TO MONSIEUR DE BRÉOT

CHAPTER FIVE 120

HISTORY OF THE LOVE AFFAIRS, DEATH AND SINGULAR OBSEQUIES OF THE DUCHESS DE GRIGNY

CHAPTER SIX 191

HOW MONSIEUR HERBOU CONCLUDED THE STORY HE HAD RECOUNTED TO MONSIEUR DE BRÉOT

CHAPTER SEVEN 198

IN WHICH MONSIEUR DE BERCAILLÉ REAPPEARS TO DISAPPEAR

PAGE

CHAPTER EIGHT 216

HOW MONSIEUR LE VARLON DE VERRIGNY DID SPLENDID THOUGH UNNECESSARY PENITENCE WITH THE EXCELLENT ADVICE MONSIEUR DE LA BÉGISSIÈRE VOUCHSAFED HIM

CHAPTER NINE AND LAST 259

IN WHICH MONSIEUR DE BRÉOT PURCHASES A SUIT OF GREEN VELVET AND AGAIN BEHOLDS MADAME DE BLIONNE

THE LIBERTINES

CHAPTER ONE

HOW MONSIEUR DE BRÉOT MADE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF MONSIEUR FLOREAU DE BERCAILLÉ

EACH year at the return of spring, M. Floreau de Bercaillé fell into a humor which rapidly developed into hypochondria if the necessary tonic were not taken, a tonic he did not neglect employing when he felt the need of it.

So one fine morning M. Floreau de Bercaillé blew out his candle, donned his hat, tucked the key under his doormat, and descended to the street. Once in the street he sniffed the air, stamped on the pavement with his heels and in a fine fettle lifted his goatish snout to observe the high and narrow window of his garret where for so many long nights he had, with his feet in straw and an old gabardine across his shoulders, toiled over his little ink smeared table of white wood. It was at this table he produced melodious verses calculated to please the ear or pretty ballets calculated to please the eye, both products yielding in return not only that praise

which flattered his vain heart, but an occasional purse garnished with sufficient gold to permit him to sustain his genius.

For his genius was employed by turns in bringing to birth odes, sonnets, madrigals, epigrams, or ballets. He nevertheless found no little trouble in adapting his talent to the tastes and fashions of the times, which desired that everything be uniformly refined and that only the loftiest and newest sentiments be expressed. M. de Bercaillé freely admitted that it was an arduous profession and that at the very least it should be practiced comfortably seated upon a good nap cushion, and not perched, as he was, on a cheap straw-bottomed chair that wore out his stockings and scratched and polished his breech.

To him poverty appeared the worst condition in which to bring forth those things of beauty one always expects of poets. A miserable, unheated, little garret did not seem the proper place to convoke the assemblage of Gods and the company of Goddesses, nor the place to summon the heroes of mythology to draw upon their adventures for scenes to be danced or for allegorical figures. Moreover, persons of quality hardly stood upon ceremony when visiting someone who had only the edge

of an untidy bed to receive them on and whom they found in his garret with no other laurels about his temples than a greasy woolen night cap drawn down over his ears and the back of his neck to protect him from the cold.

If, however, M. Floreau de Bercaillé had been suffered to place on paper what frequently rose to his mind, he would have been happier. He had a certain taste for low comedy and could easily have excelled in it, but by a misfortune he deplored, the fashion for it has passed, even though it had once been everywhere popular. The racy and robust jests that had formerly been found amusing by even the best people were now rejected with abhorrence by even the most vulgar. One was obliged to be noble, pompous, and genteel. No longer did anyone tolerate that joyful, healthy and swaggering ribaldry which had made the good folk laugh and even the fastidious to smile. These obscenities and buffooneries no longer amused even valets. And M. Floreau de Bercaillé lamented the effect of this refinement, for he was conscious of his own gift for broad comedy which the misfortune of his time, as he said, forced him to keep to himself. To support himself he was obliged to exercise a talent that was not his own. Nevertheless,

he did his best to cut a fair figure within these restrictions and to give his compositions all the gentility and all the propriety possible, thereby to win the approbation of a critical public.

The Marquise de Preignelay, who was his patroness, was unyielding in the respect we have mentioned. As a low or vulgar word deeply offended her, M. de Bercaillé dared not risk one in her presence. He had already his own unprepossessing person to pass off, which not only had nothing patrician about it, but diffused a goatish odor which required all the mythology of his verse for one to find some resemblance in him to the Fauns and silvans of fable, whom he employed with consummate skill as characters in his ballets. Fortunately the Marquis de Preignelay proved himself to be of a more rugged constitution than his wife, for he had been brought up in an age when one had made merry over what was now condemned and which he remembered having been greatly amused by as a youth. M. Floreau de Bercaillé behind closed doors often whispered into his ear those little stories that had been ushered in disgrace out of the salon where Mme. de Preignelay presided over a witty though decorous circle.

M. Floreau de Bercaillé consoled himself for his

bonds by frequenting taverns. He left his Muse at the door when he entered and rejoined within a company where he could unbutton himself at his ease. Wine loosened their tongues. Liberties which fashion condemned in print here found a haven of refuge. M. de Bercaillé poured forth in speech what he would have never permitted himself elsewhere, and even allowed himslf to drink wine to excess. Intoxication in M. de Bercaillé was dangerous. He then revealed himself as nature had formed him. One frequently realizes that what we really are is not what the morals of a virtuous world force us to be, and one became very much aware of this truth when M. de Bercaillé went on a debauch. He then revealed himself as a buffoon, and as indifferently ribald. However, he was not alone in this, for the Prince de Thuines himself did not scorn to join in these diversions of the tavern. His impudence and impiety, so far as cynicism and obscenity went, were second to nothing uttered by the boldest member of the company, and these gentlemen in their speech had little respect for one's ears. M. de Bercaillé had his rôle in these orgies. With his elbows on the table, stuffed with food, smoking the rankest tobacco in a long pipe, he drove along at a great rate.

With wine and tobacco, serving maids were the third consolation of M. Floreau de Bercaillé against the miseries of the age and the vexations of existence. Although he had already passed his fortieth year, he still retained his physical vigor and gallant temperament, as his ruddy complexion, his bright eyes, and his flaming hair gave evidence. These appearances were not belied by the facts. Moreover, in the matter, M. de Bercaillé had certain theories of his own. He pretended to nothing more special than the wherewithal to satisfy his propensity. And to this purpose any woman's body would suffice whatever were its color, proportion, texture, or age provided that it lent itself willingly to the sport. M. de Bercaillé did not delight in laying sieges or in battering down ramparts. He announced that what he asked for was too natural to be worth any great trouble in gaining and that there was no reason, moreover, for so much careful picking and choosing when anything that turns up is worth quite as much as what one discovers after miles of voyaging and after surmounting a thousand difficulties and obstacles. Accordingly M. Floreau de Bercaillé put himself to no trouble and was quite content with whatever he fell across. All serving girls quickly learned that he was an im-

petuous and intrepid customer, and one who would brook no refusals.

He remarked, to excuse himself for it, that love being a necessity like any other, the maids whose duty it is to attend to any that we may have can very well attend to this one. He even added that because of their occupation they are always neat and clean. Their arduous occupation requires girls of physical vigor, and a fair amount of complaisancy. There is therefore an excellent chance of running across lusty and obliging young women who are delighted, once those tasks are accomplished by which they earn their daily bread, to find others which give them a slight change from the first. Simple minded as they usually are, they are exactly adapted to this simple form of diversion, with all the necessary conditions to render it sweet and wholesome, that is to say, they possess that virtue of naiveté which is only good in the common people from which they spring. What matters it that they speak their own quaint language, since it is not in this case a question of oratory or fine manners, but rather a work requiring the exertion of every effort to attain a simple, everyday pleasure, in which the place is quite unimportant and which should be relished

as much on the coarse sheets of a straw mattress as between the finest and most smoothly ironed linen.

These worthy considerations had always prevented M. Floreau de Bercaillé from aspiring to rarer game. He asserted that those ladies who occasionally wished horns on their husbands would have doubtless groaned over his goatish odor, for it must be admitted, he concluded jestingly, that these fleshly sports develop man's natural scent and that there is something about it which displeases finicky women. But a hearty and good natured wench, accustomed to changing sheets and emptying pots, would not be apt to be so particular about it.

This double preoccupation with wine and wenches ordinarily kept M. Floreau de Bercaillé in a happy frame of mind, particularly on the days when his pen easily struck off a well-turned sonnet, the point of an epigram, or the figures of a ballet. However, at a certain time of the year, for all this work he did not become less melancholy and less inclined toward a strange marasmus. He let the ink dry in his inkwell, and the tobacco go out in his pipe. When his drinking companions on Friday fell upon their bacon omelette, salting and peppering it with strong blasphemies, he re-

mained silent in his corner without a glance toward the bottle or a pinch for the maid. This condition appeared during the first days of spring when the sun dried up the Paris mud, brought out new leaves on the trees of Cours la Reine or of the Place Royale, and made the bowers of wayside inns bloom again. Proportionately as spring advanced, M. Floreau de Bercaillé sank deeper into gloom, until no longer able to bear it he descended from his garret after having locked the door and tucked the key under the doormat, to exchange it all for the country, for it was to the fields and woods M. Floreau de Bercaillé decamped each year.

For this escapade M. de Bercaillé, who was hardly what one might call exquisite about his clothes, marshalled forth from his closet what he kept there as his best. He slipped on his finest shirt, climbed into his neatest suit, and donned his biggest and bushiest wig. Thus attired he took to the road at early dawn. Once past the walls and out of Paris he began humming songs of his own invention. They were only meaningless words set to a crazy tune, but they made him laugh with pleasure the whole length of his journey. M. de Bercaillé enlivened his progress with a thousand oddities in such manner that many people turned about to

watch this strange passerby who sometimes skipped, sometimes hopped, or paced along with measured step. At times, M. de Bercaillé would halt and remain an hour or so lying in a ditch or sprawled in the grass of a meadow, then suddenly he would leap a wall, hug the trunk of a tree, or skip stones on the surface of a pond. It would require a number of days' traveling along the banks of the Seine to reach Fontainebleau and to arrive at the inn of a little hamlet called Valvins. Whatever the time was, he at once ordered a bed and a pot of wine. Having tossed off the wine he retired and slumbered until he woke up himself. If it were still night, he would turn over and sleep until the following morning.

Rising at cock-crow, M. Floreau de Bercaillé dressed with care and descended the stairs. The Seine flowed all silver along the forest, mirrored occasionally in its waters. M. de Bercaillé hailed the ferryman. The heavy barge would cut the current obliquely and slip up to the opposite bank. Then the astonished ferryman would see our friend, who had until then been seated tranquilly upon the ferry bench, spring to the shore, fling himself flat on his stomach as if to embrace the earth, and then rising to his feet make a deep bow to the trees and

enter within their shadows, for it was thus that M. Floreau de Bercaillé rendered homage to Nature, mingling with its solitude and renewing within him the realization of man's true substance.

* * *

M. de Bercaillé did not believe that our soul differed from our body, nor that it would endure longer. The confluence of our atoms is only one of the games of a vast universe. We remain similar to the things that surround us, although we try to deceive ourselves that it is otherwise. It was this conviction M. Floreau de Bercaillé was explaining to M. de Bréot, seated before him at the same table of the little inn where they had just met and where they were conversing for the first time.

"Is it not strange, Monsieur," said M. Floreau de Bercaillé, wiping off his elbows and knees that were stained with the grass he had been sprawling in all day long, "to pass our whole existence considering Nature only in those forms man has imposed upon her and viewing her only in those aspects, when she has so many others which she owes only to herself? Indeed, streets, coaches and houses are pleasant to look upon, but do they not tend to persuade us that man is something other than he really is? Does not the danger lie there, and do we not deceive our-

selves most curiously in accepting the conditions in which he lives as that to which he is most fitted and as an accurate index of his capacity? Is it not this fallacy which leads him to believe that, apart from what is perishable in all living creatures, he possesses that indefinable something called immortality, that airy dream from which springs that pride he would do well to cast off? Many honest souls have fortunately been able to place themselves above this vanity. They have determined to recognize the fact that there is nothing distinct or special in us, and that we are like everything that surrounds us:—only one aspect of matter. I hope that you take pleasure in the company of these gentlemen. Your conversation has proved to me that you are of our opinion in what is really important, whereby I am made very happy, Monsieur, for your face at first sight inspired me with more esteem for you than I know how to say."

M. de Bréot applauded M. de Bercaillé for having spoken so well and raised his glass to toast him. In proportion as M. de Bercaillé emptied and filled his glass, further did he stray from those philosophic considerations which he had at first expounded to M. de Bréot, until he finally descended to homelier matters, such as the varying quality

of wine dispensed in the Paris taverns and the virtuosity of the bar maids who served it. M. de Bréot was little by little forced to admit that if he were in full agreement with his new found friend on questions pertaining to the origins and destination of man, he could not approve of his attitude toward the origins and purposes of women, nor of his manner of comporting himself with them, even though one might have the honor of disbelieving in God.

For to be truthful it was M. de Bréot's sincere conviction that the higher forms of Libertinism did not oblige one to eat like a glutton or swill wine, any more than it obliged one to smoke pipes of tobacco and roar out lewd and blistering curses at heaven, or even of bussing the nearest wench, which the pious could do as well as Libertines. M. de Bréot concluded, therefore, with this argument: that the most devout heretic needed no flourish of trumpets to proclaim his impiety, and could live surrounded by all his ideas in a decency and modesty more in consonance with the life of the virtuous, than by asserting too blatantly that he did not share the beliefs of the unenlightened. He explained this conviction of his to M. Floreau de Bercaillé.

"You are right," the latter replied, "and if you could persuade our Libertines of its truth you would render a great service to our cause, which is the true cause since it not only conduces one to live according to Nature, but at the same time frees him from superstitions by veering his mind away from that vain presumption that the human animal occupies a place in creation which merits the attention of the Creator. It is this type of vanity among the religious which predisposes me against them. They would not be content did they not believe that God is personally interested in their souls and feels the effects of their conduct in his own. Your advice, Monsieur, thus appears singularly wise to me and without ever hoping to be able to observe it myself, I should be happy to learn how you acquired its basic principles. Inform me then, Monsieur, while I am still capable of understanding you, for this light wine is beginning to make my head spin, and I fear that I will very soon be less able than I am now to learn whence they come and indeed who you are."

"I will tell you first of all, Monsieur," M. de Bréot began, "that I am of the quality. If I mention my position in society do not perceive thereby a sign of my vanity, but much rather the result of

a certain modesty I expect in all those who, like me, are of a good family but not an illustrious one. In this last point it would be sufficient for me merely to mention my name for you to be convinced of my family's position and I would not take the trouble to relieve you of any ignorance which you might quite excusably have of my own. My name is M. de Bréot, a name which means something in our province, but which means very little to anyone not acquainted with Berry. It was there I was born and where were born with me and within me those principles you have found so praiseworthy. In fact one must admit that the idea of man's lowliness comes very natural to man, since it has been merely sufficient for me to exist in order to be little by little persuaded of it. For a long time I have seen its power grow, until the day when it clearly dawned upon me that we must act the part Nature describes for us, that is to say, a rôle temporary and perishable. Though I, like everyone else, have been taught that there is a something within us which will last longer than our bodies, I swear to you that this sort of immortality was never to my taste and means nothing to me. If it be within God's power to endow us with immortality, it would be much easier for him to let us

remain as we are, instead of blessing us with a second life only at the expense of the first. Finally, to make matters brief, I am content with the idea of living but once and I stop there. This notion, far from depressing me has filled me with an irresistible longing to be happy and to enjoy the days of existence which are by necessity entirely restricted to this world. I am fond of pleasures and I have tasted a few. One of those which I prefer is to sing to the lute. I can accompany it with a voice which is not disagreeable. I find particular pleasure in making love to a woman. It is in these diversions that I have passed the twenty-five years of my life.

"You may consider, Monsieur, that it is possible to employ oneself more profitably than I have employed my youth, but as an excuse I offer the fact that I have found no occasion to conduct myself differently. However, I feel that I am capable of as high deeds as the next person, yet nothing has ever led me to attempt any, for the condition to which I was born did not incline me in that direction. I will add that opportunity has taken no trouble to make up for Fortune's indifference toward me, which is particularly irritating as I am not the kind who puts himself to great pains to

beget one of those happy accidents favorable to great things.

"All things come in their time, and events take place which determine our destiny in a direction we have the least dreamed of. It was thus that I decided to leave my province for Paris, and it is under full sail of this venture that you see me today. I have succumbed to the reproaches leveled against my indolence, and if I have consented to shake myself free of it, I am nevertheless led to believe that it is much better to return to it later than to cling to it with an obstinacy I might regret when I am too old to renounce it.

"Is not Paris the place, Monsieur, of all the world where Fortune most often showers man with her gifts? It seems to me that I should offer myself at least once to her whims, and appear in the place where chance occasions are the most profitable. If this attempt fails and the capricious Goddess passes by me without a word, there will remain nothing to do but return to my province. There will I end my days without regret and with no one to reproach me for not having attempted the experiment each man should submit himself to cheerfully."

M. Floreau de Bercaillé listened attentively to

M. de Bréot's discourse. He seemed to applaud more than one point by solemnly wagging his head, but this was perhaps due less to the interest he took in the discourse than to a certain top-heaviness caused by the large number of bottles he had emptied. Moreover it was with thick and affectionate words that he replied.

"I very much fear that you will return sooner than you expect to your province, and I am astonished that you have ever dreamed of leaving it. Have you not been happy there, with good bed and board, and twanging this lute of yours whose pleasant music can distract the slow hours flowing between the table and the counterpane? You will not find it more attractive in Paris. If you had a soul encumbered with superstitions I might understand that you would like to join us in order to relieve yourself of the more oppressive of them. But your mind is healthy and cannot be improved, and if it were only you and I who believed in God, it would, Monsieur, be a different matter. But what the devil do you hope to find in Paris? Men of sympathy and understanding are not wanted there. It is no longer as it was during the years of disorder when a thousand and one favorable opportunities were offered to an honest man and when For-

tune's ladder was within reach of all those who wished to climb it.

"Ah! Monsieur, all is changed. You must realize that order reigns everywhere, and is so firmly established by a powerful and punctilious king that an individual is no longer anything more than a link in the chain or a cog in the wheel. Each man to his trade, and it seems to me that yours is twanging this lute, as mine is to make verses. Restrict yourself to that, and consider yourself more than happy in possessing a gift greatly enjoyed by society, for the art of plucking the strings of an instrument is more highly esteemed than that of plucking lofty, graceful, and elegant ideas from one's brain. To such a low state have the times fallen, Monsieur. We cannot change them and they can change us profoundly.

"That is the reason I warn you that Libertines are not well looked upon in the city you are approaching. The king is not devout, but he is religious; and he wishes that everyone make a show of being like him, even if one has no religion at all. But you will see to what a condition our Libertines have been reduced:—to whisper in each other's ears or to lock themselves up in the backrooms of taverns. The status of Libertinism has

been greatly reduced and the few libertinisms they permit us are permitted only on account of our lax morals, for one explains our convictions by the freedom they give to our conduct, rather than rendering us honor for the untrammeled state of our souls. That, Monsieur, is where the times stand and the day will soon come when I shall be forced to live the whole year through in this forest where in springtime I love to roam attended by my imagination and my thoughts. It is here you will find me no longer dressed in man's clothing, but wandering about naked on all fours, for I would rather imagine myself an animal and eat grass than cherish vulgar errors or to believe that I am more than a perishable and transient creature, formed by an inexplicable caprice of Nature. For, so far as life is concerned, man has no other destiny than that of death, and nothing to expect of death but the certitude of no longer existing.

"And lo! Monsieur, if at this point the boy does not lead out your horse! Let us part then. We will see each other at Paris, and while you are on your way there, I will profit by the pleasant state to which wine has raised me to compose a little ballet the Marquise de Preignelay has required of me to be performed at her château du Verduron. I will

think up entrance speeches, tropes, and allegories while drinking your health from this bottle which dances a little ballet itself before my eyes."

And M. Floreau de Bercaillé with a slightly befuddled eye watched M. de Bréot, mounted on his horse, slowly disappear along the road which followed the river, while he drew onto his knees the little country girl employed in filling his bottle.

CHAPTER TWO

IN WHICH MONSIEUR DE BRÉOT
BEHOLDS MADAME DE BLIONNE AND ENCOUNTERS
MONSIEUR LE VARLON DE VERRIGNY

WHEN Mme. de Blionne entered as Nymph of the Fountains, the four gamboling Fauns in their horned periwigs and green suits scattered to make way for her. She advanced across the stage to the border of flickering tapers.

Arches of green branches, their pillars festooned with flowery garlands, formed the wings and background of this silvan theater. At the foot of each pillar stood an earthenware pot from which rose a dwarf orange or lemon tree bearing golden fruits within its deftly trimmed globe of foliage.

All eyes were turned toward Mme. de Blionne. She faced the audience seated in rows in the parterre. Behind it stretched a lawn sloping upward in the form of an amphitheater where lounged those guests for whom no chairs, or stools or benches remained. For the Marquise de Preignelsy had gathered a numerous company of guests at her

château du Verduron, there to divert them with various entertainments, whereof the least was certainly not this ballet.

If the costumes of the four Fauns—MM. du Tronquoy, de Breuvières, de la Morinaie and de Gaillardin—and the sprightliness with which these gentlemen capered about in them, were a delight to see, there was even more delight in beholding the costume of Mme. de Blionne. Her petticoat spread out around her in a vast amplitude of silvery cloth, skillfully embroidered with a design which represented all manner of water flowers. Their pliant stems, twining about her waist and bosom, formed a basket where nestled the firm fruit of her breasts. They were indeed lovely breasts, but not more lovely than her sculptured face beneath the mass of her curled hair, glittering with diamonds. In all her finery she truly resembled a fountain, not only in the flowery pool mirrored upon her gown, but in the fountain-basin of her shoulders and in the sparkling fringe of her curls.

Seated on a turf bench where he had made himself comfortable, M. de Bréot did not suffer his eyes to leave the radiant figure of Mme. de Blionne. She gracefully evaded the loutish attempts of the four periwigged Fauns, who dallied about her or with

adroit frisks and gambols strove to express their longing to quench their thirst at her crystal waters. They indicated their failure by a thousand varied contortions calculated to accentuate the extravagance of their disguise and particularly of their masks which completely hid their faces and rendered the gentlemen laughably, though intentionally grotesque.

M. de Bréot, however, laughed not at all. The four capering Fauns could not succeed in distracting him. Instead of following their antics he continued under the spell of Mme. de Blionne. Her body turning his thoughts into very definite channels, there awoke within him a mood of amorous longing. The diversions at Verduron had doubtless contributed toward inclining his humor in this direction, for during the three preceding days M. and Mme. de Preignelay had spared nothing to regale their guests. Supper had been served in various corners of the estate, and one evening all had dined in a spacious grotto adorned with Italian shell work and with all manner of aquatic curiosities. Conversation had had its turn, together with ninepins and running-at-the-ring. This very evening a display of fireworks, following the ballet, was to mark the climax of

the entertainments. It is true that everyone had worked for their success, M. Congieri as well as M. Floreau de Bercaillé. The pyrotechnist Congieri was that little swarthy man from Milan whom one had encountered all day long, with rosettes of ribbons on his shoulder and his fuse-cane in hand, trotting hither and thither to prepare the set pieces and adjust the skyrockets and other fireworks, while M. Floreau de Bercaillé, who had created and directed the ballet of Fauns, was on pins and needles lest the cues and dance steps be forgotten, meanwhile mopping his forehead on which straggled from beneath his raised wig tufts of coarse red hair, the same colored hair that in spite of his razor pricked through his cheeks—and who, moreover, diffused a goat-like scent whenever he raised his arms.

M. de Bréot kept his eyes fixed upon Mme. de Blionne, who stood in her silvery robe against the bright background of leaves. He reflected, not without a slight twinge of anxiety, that due to the heaviness of her dress and the exertion of dancing, she must have become warm in her Nymph's costume. Her skin must be drenched, her body streaming with perspiration. It no doubt glistened upon her body like pearls, or slyly stole down her

back and between her breasts, tightly gluing her damp shift to her skin. And M. de Bréot, as if the silvery gown had become transparent, even as the waters of a fountain, suddenly beheld Mme. de Blionne as if she were standing all naked before him. In his mind's eye he beheld her long legs, her strong thighs, her ample hips, her smooth stomach, her ripening bosom with its snowy skin, and so distinctly and so actually that imagining he already caressed this moist and yielding warmth, he leaned forward to breathe in its wholesome and voluptuous perfume.

He could not distinguish it, however, among all the perfumes with which the night was heavy. The smell of lamp-oil and the wax of tapers mingled in the air with the scent of musk and amber diffused by the dresses of the women. Neither had the men denied themselves the use of powder and sachet. The warmed effluvium drifted to M. de Bréot's nostrils, bearing with it the smell of leaves, of flowers, of trampled grass; but it was in vain he searched among this welter of odors for the one aroused in his mind by the naked and dripping body of Mme. de Blionne, that charming Nymph of the Fountains who stood in her robe of silver amid the arches of verdure, while masked Fauns

danced around her to the music of violins and hautboys.

M. de Bréot was thus casting a last glance upon Mme. de Blionne, now retiring amid a triumphant retinue of shepherds who led away the captured Fauns, when a lusty sigh uttered almost in his ear caused him to turn his head. The author of the sigh was a man of medium stature, whose rubicund face glistened beneath a large black wig. His eyebrows were bushy, his mouth large, his chin round. His entire appearance was that of weight and stolidity. His eyes met those of M. de Bréot. A similar desire seemed to animate the two gentlemen, which the former expressed by a kind of greedy pouting, blowzy cheeks, and a trembling chin, altogether so indecent that M. de Bréot entertained a feeling of hostility toward him. This hostility was increased when the fellow roughly jostled him in rising from his seat, for everyone was rising at that moment, including M. de Bréot himself, who did so along with his neighbor whom he had caught red-handed in his reveries, but whose name he did not know.

He had, however, been able to attach a name to many of the faces composing the assemblage the Marquise de Preignelay had gathered at her château du Verduron. Mme. de Preignelay retired there for

the summer less to breathe the bracing air than to provide her friends with an occasion for proving that for sheer love of her they were capable of braving the arduous and rocky road to her château. Mme. de Preignelay was a sufficiently intelligent woman to make it well worth while to display one's wit before her. Wit, however, was not an accomplishment to which the old Maréchal de Serpières, whose bent back and nodding head M. de Bréot observed nearby, could pretend. In war he rendered himself redoubtable by the train of baggage-wagons he dragged behind him everywhere and in which he flung in grand confusion whatever object struck his fancy. But here the Maréchal de Serpières attracted only slight attention at present, save by his old fashioned uniform and by his custom of spitting everywhere, not only on the floor, but into the air or against the tapestries, quite hit or miss and at the risk of catching any unfortunate neighbor full in the eye. Mme. de Preignelay overlooked this peculiarity of the brave Maréchal on account of his influence at court. Besides he was extremely well attended and except for the Prince de Thuines, was the most considerable person of the company. The Prince de Thuines was young and handsome. Very eager after women, he demanded that they

surrender to him at the first overtures that he might the sooner be rid of them. In spite of his reputation as untrustworthy in love, he easily seduced all women by his pleasant face and his wit, which was malicious and which he used unscrupulously in order to add to his faithlessness the cruelty of giving reasons for it, by attributing it to those secret imperfections detected in the most beautiful women when one has ceased to believe that there could be no woman more beautiful. Mme. de Preignelay excused this viciousness in the Prince for she was no longer of an age to risk anything more than dangerous conversation. There remained for her merely the pleasure of hearing him slander those unfortunate ladies who had exposed themselves to the sarcasm with which the Prince de Thuines generously recompensed them for past favors.

Besides the Prince de Thuines and the Maréchal, M. de Bréot had recognized a great number of fine gentlemen among whom were judges and bankers, as for example, Président de Narlay, M. de Cadonville, and the famous M. Herbou, the contractor, who was second to no one in elegance and refinement. Ladies moreover were not lacking. All of them were not of Mme. de Preignelay's age nor

that of Mme. de Cheverus, who was Mme. de Blionne's mother, and whose corpulent and contented face revealed vestiges of a beauty which no longer endeavored to charm, but which still retained, from having been found charming in the past, that species of mellow vivacity which adorns, when they are young no longer, those ladies who have been admired when they were. If Mmes. de Preignelay and de Cheverus had renounced love, Mmes. de Galize, de Vaudre and many another offered what was necessary to inspire it, not to forget Mme. de Circourt who did not fear to share the emotion M. de Saint Germond cherished toward her. MM. de Frasin and des Rigaux affected a scorn for women, and with knowing smiles conversed about them in whispers. M. de Bréot drew away from these two cynics and again encountered his erstwhile and lovelorn neighbor who was now gesticulating amid a group of gentlemen. The name of Mme. de Blionne floated to M. de Bréot's ears. He would have willingly joined in the chorus of praise being raised to her, but the adulation he should have liked to utter was scarcely the kind which could properly be expressed aloud. Moreover, he wished to keep to himself the discoveries he had made in the silvery costume of the charming

Nymph when she had for an instant appeared to him visible in her most secret loveliness and even in the very form and structure of her beauty.

* * *

It was with these thoughts that he followed the company which the Marquis de Preignelay now led to a point of vantage whence all would obtain a clearer view of the fireworks M. Congieri of Milan was preparing to touch off. Upon a terrace in front of the château the company then seated itself to enjoy this pyrotechnic display which was to make the climax of the fête. Afterwards the madder and more youthful of the guests could dance till dawn to the music of violins, while the rest could snatch a little sleep, for many were obliged to take to their coaches early in the morning that they might reach Paris before the heat became too oppressive. Once in Paris they would not fail to spread the news that M. and Mme. de Preignelay in their château du Verduron had for three consecutive days entertained, fed and lodged more than sixty people (of whom many were of high degree) and moreover with such perfect and well-planned hospitality that each guest had been afforded everything he could possibly desire, and everyone had had his own bed and his own room,

save for one or two whom it had been necessary to place together.

It was for this reason that M. de Bréot had, upon his arrival, been shown to a room already occupied by MM. de Frasin and des Rigaux. As M. de Bréot did not languish after these two gentlemen as bed-fellows, he had ordered the valet to show him to the room of M. Floreau de Bercaillé who received him there as hospitably as he could. But M. de Bréot had to content himself with a mattress laid on the floor, which was not accomplished without awakening a little servant-girl whom M. de Bercaillé had tucked into his own bed and about whom he made excuses to M. de Bréot. M. de Bréot slept soundly, for M. de Bercaillé had already concluded with the girl the more important item of her daily round and he did not wake her again until morning for a brief farewell in which he displayed more tenderness than vigor.

* * *

It was to rejoin this girl that M. de Bercaillé had just bidden good night to M. de Bréot, at whose side he had sat watching the fireworks. The prolonged applause rendered to the Milanese inventions of M. Congieri had irritated M. Floreau de Bercaillé. It angered him to see that this pageant of

gunpowder had not less vogue than those pageants in which he himself claimed to excel and which required in their creation a vast expenditure of intelligence and wit, a deep knowledge of mythology, and the genius for producing a delightful play, not only by the beauty of costumes but by the concealed meanings and allusions it contained. Thus M. de Bercaillé in his Ballet of Fauns had symbolically described how the Marquis de Preignelay had transformed the rustic solitude of Verduron into a charming garden of gushing springs and fountains. Was not this the significance of that lovely nymph, victorious over the horned and loutish gods of the woods? But the majority of the spectators had understood it only as a pretty dance in bright costumes. M. Floreau de Bercaillé cursed his craft and lamented the tortures he sacrificed to it, while an Italian charlatan could attract attention by merely touching off some gunpowder enclosed in so many paper cartridges and thus produce some fancy colors and an ear-splitting racket in the sky.

* * *

With these bitter remarks, M. de Bercaillé had taken leave of M. de Bréot to repair to his bed, urging the latter to do likewise. But M. de Bréot

was not sleepy, and moreover he preferred the solitude of the gardens to his mattress from which listening post he would have been obliged to hear M. de Bercaillé making his bed groan in honor of the little girl who awaited him there. What is more, the night continued to be extremely beautiful. The air which had now lost the smell of M. Congieri's powder and skyrockets seemed limpid and almost transparent. Lamps guttered along the garden-plots which they had framed with their scattered lights. Here and there a few dying lanterns flickered in a grove or thicket.

Divers wandering paths finally led M. de Bréot to the rustic theater. The last candles were wasting away. M. de Bréot seated himself for a moment on the turf bench where he had watched Mme. de Blionne dance. He hoped that she might again appear. He closed his eyes and the image of the alluring Nymph rose in his memory, radiant but smaller, clothed in her same bright colors, but far away. M. de Bréot no longer experienced the same yearning which had so moved him only a short while before, but he felt a distinct happiness in realizing that there moved in the world a woman whose body was so completely beautiful.

Surrendering himself to these thoughts, M. de

Bréot arose. A slight breeze ruffling the leaves above his head brought the sound of violins to his ears. He turned his steps toward the music, guiding his course as well as possible through the labyrinth of hedges. Reaching a point where several paths crossed, he paused, uncertain. In the darkness he seemed to hear a moaning voice that at intervals ceased, and again returned to its lamentations. M. de Bréot took a few steps forward and found himself facing the grotto of sea shells. The pediment was still illuminated. A man was kneeling at the threshold. His shadow writhing before him on the lighted ground assumed fantastic outlines. The stranger seemed to be afflicted with a spiritual disorder, for his head was bare, and he was pounding his chest with his clenched fists. M. de Bréot observing the man's face more closely was astonished to recognize in this posture the gentleman who had delivered himself of so lusty a sigh when Mme. de Blionne appeared on the stage surrounded by her capering Fauns.

M. de Bréot was on the point of hastily retiring without further inquiry as to what curious rites the stranger was performing there, when the latter addressed him with the following words:

"Whoe'er you be, Monsieur, do not fear to ap-

proach me. I am not, as you might be led to believe, some malevolent madman, nor am I one of those sorcerers or magicians who claw the ground to find treasure there, neither am I a drunkard full of wine and wind, although even so gross a figure might be far nobler than that in which I now appear before myself and before God. It is not necessary for me to invent more vileness than I have, for I am conscious of all my own, and inasmuch as man by sin loses his place in creation and descends to the lowest of brute beasts, I am, Monsieur, a most lowly and bestial sinner."

And so saying he pounded his breast again. His face, which M. de Bréot remembered seeing all blowzy with desire at the dancing of Mme. de Blionne, now displayed a confusion wherein one could observe a sincere disgust with himself. The corners of his heavy mouth were drawn down in peevish discouragement.

"Consider me, Monsieur," he continued after a moment, "and thereby learn how feeble is man without God's help and the support of his divine grace. We are but mud, Monsieur, but if our mortal clay is perishable the spark which animates it is not. We die and it survives. Heaven receives it or it is cast into the fires of hell. And is not this a

terrible thing to think upon, even though God has wished thereby to mark out the condition in which he keeps us and the consideration he has for us?"

He stopped speaking and took breath like one practiced in oratory.

"You are doubtless astonished," he continued, "that I am capable, in the disorder wherein you see me, of giving some little logic and an occasional happy turn of phrase to my discourse. It is an accomplishment I owe to the profession of eloquence. I exercise it, not without its having gained me a certain degree of fame, but, alas! of what use will it be on the day of the last judgment? God is deaf. His decrees are terrible and no eloquence will avail to soften their justice and mitigate their severity."

The stranger rose to his feet. M. de Bréot noted that his clothing was not in a proper state of array. The sinner was, if one may have leave to say so, in the very regalia and regimentals of sin, his pourpoint unbuttoned, his shirt rumpled, and his hose dangling over the heels of his shoes. As M. de Bréot drew nearer to him he readjusted his garments slightly.

"By my troth and is it you, Monsieur?" said he, as he took M. de Bréot by the arm in the most affable and familiar manner. "I recognize your face

even though I do not know your name. A short while ago I observed in your face that perilous fire, that *ignis fatuus* that leads one into the foulest transgressions. You love women, yes, you too, and not for their souls but for their flesh, and I swear that hot for love you are hastening straight toward sin."

M. de Bréot did not deny it and smiled.

"Do not smile!" cried the stout man in a loud voice. "Do not smile! Little do you know who stands before you, Monsieur!"

M. de Bréot believed the stranger was about to tell his name. He was curious to know who the person of this fantastic encounter was. The stranger dropped back a few steps.

"You do not know who I am, Monsieur? I am a damned soul!"

His face revealed a veritable terror and he covered it with his hands as if to shield his eyes from the flames of hell. Then he sank back on the bench of shells. One could hear the wind rustling in the trees and the sound of distant violins.

"I am, however, an upright man," he continued after a rather long silence, "and I fear God. I was bred in respect of his laws and his commandments. I conform my life to them as well as I can and I

must add that their observance is generally easy for me. I have no pride, which I believe I am proving to you by thus opening up my heart. Neither am I avaricious. I have wealth and I spend it liberally. I preserve it without attempting to increase it and I allow it to increase only by a re-investment of its surplus. My house and establishment is a fine one. My coach and dress are in keeping with my condition and my rank. I discharge my obligations and I perform my duties faithfully. That is to say, I am not lazy. I am never angry except with myself. My gluttony is trifling. I treat my friends more indulgently than I treat myself and I do not drink wine; I dread its fumes. However, I must eat. My body is robust and requires substantial nourishment. There, Monsieur, have I not painted a most noble portrait? Does it not appear that a man made after its image must live according to all God's precepts? I have not mentioned that I am also religious. Are not all the conditions of man's salvation here? Has not my salvation every earmark of being assured? Here is a man, you could say, who will certainly reach heaven, if not along paths trodden by saints, at least by the broad highway that leads the great body of the elected there."

His voice had become stronger. The interior of

the grotto, at whose entrance the two were sitting, caught it up and flung it back to them deeper and more reverberating.

"But alas, Monsieur," he continued after a pause, "it is to no avail, and all because Nature has placed within me an instinct which is my ruin."

And with a gesture he pulled up his refallen hose.

"Why must I, Monsieur, obey this demon in my reins? It is he who leads me into sin, he who will plunge me into hell-fire."

Whenever he pronounced the word "hell" the dread sound produced an expression of genuine terror upon the stranger's face. Large beads of sweat burst forth on his forehead and he brushed them away with his hairy hand.

"I have done everything to constrain myself," he proceeded, "and God until now has refused me his grace, without which man can do nothing for himself except to exhaust his strength in vain efforts. I am fond of women, Monsieur. And this propensity is stronger than my will to control it. I realize I am under its dominion and I am conscious of all my weakness and all my turpitude. It is indeed this very passion that has kept me from marriage, for I believe you are about to tell me

that in taking a wife and in taking a beautiful one, I would be able to find a legitimate channel for a passion whose tumult I cannot control. Ah! would you have me then soil the conjugal bed with the disorders of my concupiscence or add to the frenzy of my lust the awful crime of adultery? For after all, to what good would this useless subterfuge be? My sin is within me."

And he thumped his fists vigorously against his breast.

"Do not believe, however, that I admire and delight in it. On the contrary I detest it, and it appears to me both in other men and in myself, as the most revolting thing in the world. Through it man degrades himself to the level of a brute, whose hands grope, whose nose lifts to the scent, whose mouth slavers, and whose entire corporeal fury ends in a brief and ridiculous contortion. And it is at this, Monsieur, that I will have passed a good part of my life. If I were still young I would discover some excuse for it, but I am young no longer. Each day wafts me nearer to perdition, and my perdition is inevitable, unless some great miracle completely transforms me or that God himself regenerates the man I am, the man I hope you are not, Monsieur, whoever you may be."

He stared into M. de Bréot's face who, however, bore his glance in silence.

"But no, Monsieur, you are not like me. Indeed, when a little time ago we beheld Mme. de Blionne dancing and our eyes met, still aflame with the spectacle, I read in yours the same desire that was devouring me and yet, Monsieur, I find you here, your face serene and your clothes in order, while I confront you with my shirt rumpled, my wig askew, and my pourpoint unbuttoned."

He sighed again, but this time with less pain than sorrow, for it was in a calmer tone that he continued.

"It was, however, only to implore God for his help and to entreat Him to dissipate the agitation into which so pagan a spectacle had thrown me, that I betook me to this grotto. I will confess to you, in addition, that I do not take pleasure in the display of fireworks and skyrockets. Those explosions which redden the sky, those bombs and crackers that split one's ears, to me only suggest the eternal fires. I see the reflection of flames singeing my own soul and my nose is outraged by the odor of burning that fills the air. I therefore remained while all the uproar lasted sitting as calmly as one could wish in the interior of this rustic grot. I had

arranged myself comfortably in a sort of nook where I remained at peace with everything, and to distract my mind between two prayers I was occupying my thoughts by examining certain problems of my profession. It is in the silence, Monsieur, that one can best prepare one's speeches. Thus meditated upon, they come forth richer and more abundantly.

"I had thus remained for some little while and was preparing to leave my retreat and retire to bed. I already felicitated myself upon the soothing effect prayer and solitude had had upon me, when I heard footsteps upon the sandy floor of the grotto. Two women entered. They had left the ball for some reason or other, but had not yet noted my presence. In order not to risk overhearing what they doubtless had to say to each other privately, I was about to warn them by a movement that I was there, but I quickly discovered that I had been mistaken as to their intentions and that they had repaired to the grotto, not for purposes of conversation, but to ingenuously fulfill an honest desire, for tucking up their petticoats they with peals of liquid laughter undamned the pent-up floods and torrents of their nature. Ah! Monsieur, the craft and subtlety of satan! To what wiles and

tricks does he not descend to lead us to him! Why did I not flee? But could I realize that the spectacle of so vulgar a function would have any other effect than to induce in me a pious consideration of our lowliness and a lively sense of the little that we are? Do you believe it, Monsieur, but that spectacle, in place of producing the effect I anticipated, produced upon me one that was altogether different! I bounded from the darkness where I was sitting. One of the two women had time to rise, and fled uttering a little cry, but the other one, Monsieur . . ."

And the stout man lowered his head in the most abject grief.

"Indeed," replied M. de Bréot courteously, after a moment, "what you have just related, Monsieur, does not entirely surprise me. Nature has placed many conflicting instincts within us, and what inclined your temper to this exploit is not so strange as you may believe. One can be an upright and virtuous man and yet love women for the lowest and most ordinary functions of their bodies. But this does not prevent one from conducting oneself judiciously in all such matters, and even in this particular case, why should you reproach yourself so bitterly? What real injury has it caused you?

And are you not remorseful because you wish to be? I do not mean to say that it is not more delicate to fuse love with those nobler sentiments which you have exchanged for boldness and vigor, although even the most exquisite and refined of lovers always consummates his affection as you have yours, a bit less bluntly, perhaps, than in the incident you have just reported to me."

The stranger was deeply attentive to M. de Bréot's speech, even permitting him to continue without interruption.

"What I find reprehensible in your conduct, Monsieur," proceeded M. de Bréot, "and the point of which I do not wholly approve, is the violence you employed to overcome this lady's resistance. Indeed, it is hardly more than natural for us to follow our desire, particularly when it is overpowering, but still we must be sure that it does not coerce others in whom it is not present. Now it is apparent that this lady whom you have mentioned did not repair to this grotto of sea-shells in the expectation that someone might do to her what you have done. She repaired hither to satisfy an honest desire and you were very wrong in my opinion, to impose yours upon her. There you have, Monsieur, my sentiments concerning the matter,

and forgive me the liberty I take in making them plain to you."

Slightly before M. de Bréot had begun his speech, dawn had shown signs of breaking. The sky grew white above the trees. To M. de Bréot it seemed that the face of the stranger lighted up with a little smile which enlivened his eyes and mouth. His forehead cleared and it was almost in a bantering tone that he replied to M. de Bréot.

"What you say, Monsieur, is certainly not lacking in sense. Women are so generous with those favors which men are continually demanding of them, that it is quite unnecessary to force them. It is true that the readiness they display might well be an excuse for man to be the aggressor, for they really seem made for the use we put them to, and this Mme. du Tronquoy is like all the rest of them, for it is indeed she, Monsieur, who was here a moment or so ago, and whose husband capered so nimbly as one of Mme. de Blionne's horned and periwigged Fauns."

And the stout man burst into laughter. Then suddenly his face darkened and he added piteously, lowering his voice.

"Nevertheless, Monsieur, I have committed a great sin, for God, Monsieur, has forbidden it."

M. de Bréot began in his turn to laugh.

"The prohibition dates from far back, Monsieur. God meanwhile has grown old, and I fear that he has lost, along with the memory of his commandments, even the memory of himself."

The stranger glanced at M. de Bréot with evident alarm.

"Would you be blasphemous, Monsieur! For though I find much indulgence for man in your conversation, I observe hardly any fear of God. Do you not believe that he exists?"

"It would be a great deal, Monsieur," replied M. de Bréot, quietly, "to assert that he does not exist, and too much, perhaps, to affirm that he does; therefore it seems to me sufficient to admit that he might be."

The stranger rose and measured M. de Bréot from head to foot. Upon his clothes were traces of the wet sand in which he had disported with Mme. du Tronquoy. Without realizing that at every turn he revealed his undershirt, he strode back and to in agitation.

"That he might be, Monsieur, that he might be . . . but does not everything prove that he exists: we ourselves, whom he has created, this earth on which we stand, the harmony of the

spheres and the motion of the stars, and this lovely dawn with which the east is all aglow?"

And with a raised finger he pointed toward the sky. Rich and transparent colors delicately superposed were spread there. The violins had ceased and birds began singing. The sand of the path glittered gently with its tiny, moist pebbles. The gardens of Verduron were charming in their matutinal freshness. The stranger took M. de Bréot by the arm as they walked along in silence.

At a bend in the hedge path, the château appeared. M. de Bréot attempted to withdraw his arm, but the stranger retained it.

"Ah! Monsieur, do not consider for a moment leaving me like this. Would you not rather that we return together to Paris? I have ordered my servants to be ready at dawn. My coach is not uncomfortable and along the way we can discuss a great many problems. Heaven, Monsieur, has endowed me with a little eloquence and I do not know how I can employ it more profitably than in convincing you of those truths from which you seem to have wandered afar. God has placed you on my path for me to bring you back to him. It will be a great opportunity for both of us. Who can tell, but in return for a lost soul I will bring

Him from the depths of impiety and irreligion, God may accord me that grace without which naught availeth in the struggle against sin. Do not deny me this opportunity and tell me, Monsieur, what I should call you and what name you were given at your christening, for if great changes are to be wrought in you, it is rather to the baptismal font than to the confessional that you must be led."

"My christian name is Armand, Monsieur, and I am called Monsieur de Bréot."

"Excellent, Monsieur de Bréot. I am Monsieur Le Varlon de Verrigny, advocate in the *Grand Conseil* and a miserable sinner."

And so saying, M. Le Varlon de Verrigny opened his snuff-box, took a pinch between his fingers, inserted it within his large nose, and gaily tapped M. de Bréot on the shoulder with the air of someone assuming complete charge of his spiritual and material future.

They had rounded the château and had reached the stables where a large number of coaches were drawn up, among them being that of M. Le Varlon de Verrigny, harnessed to a pair of dapple steeds and upholstered with lustrous satin. M. de Bréot before mounting the coach, excused himself in

order to return to his room and give a few orders to his valet.

* * *

He entered the château. Everyone was sleeping. M. de Bréot passed through a large room containing a table still loaded with food. Fruit tumbled from baskets lay beside half-emptied glasses. Bees, having entered through the open windows, roamed humming through the room. Seated in a chair, with his nose in a plate, snored M. de Preignelay. He was a little man, fat and lame. He had formerly commanded sieges and marches, but now he only ordered dinners and ballets. In place of bombs and grape-shot, he now watched the skyrockets of Signor Congieri of Milan. M. de Bréot left the good M. de Preignelay to snore at his ease and climbed the stairs.

Passing along the corridors he noted the door-cards whereon were printed the names of the guests who occupied the rooms M. de Preignelay had prepared for them. He passed the room of Mme. de Blionne. The charming Nymph doubtless rested there from the pleasant fatigue of the dance. M. de Bréot sighed gently at this thought. He did not halt at the door of Maréchal de Serpières, but he noticed with surprise that Mme. du Tronquoy's

door was wide open, while stretched upon the floor lay her husband soundly slumbering in his horned wig. As he proceeded he came across a lady gliding along the wall and he immediately recognized her as Mme. du Tronquoy herself. She seemed rather put out at being caught thus hurrying at dawn through the corridors where M. de Bréot was making his way. Finally he reached the door of M. Floreau de Bercaillé's room, and softly lifted the latch.

The room was flooded with bright sunshine and M. de Bercaillé, naked and all gilded with the light which fell upon his red hair, was sprawling across his bed asleep. An odor of stables and of goats pervaded the room. As for the little maid, she had doubtless already packed herself off. M. de Bréot found his cloak, scribbled an order to his valet, and descended to find M. Le Varlon de Verrigny seated in his coach.

He at once invited M. de Bréot to place himself at his side.

"Come, Monsieur, and let us be off. I know an excellent priest along the way and I will take advantage of the opportunity to discharge myself of my sin and at the same time cause him to say a few masses for the success of your conversion,

which I certainly expect, Monsieur, to achieve. For whatever a freethinker one considers himself and whatever a noble freethinker that one may be, he must inevitably arrive where I shall lead you."

And M. Le Varlon de Verrigny tapped his new friend affably upon the shoulder.

The coachman touched his whip to the dappled rumps of the horses. The coach leaped forward and rumbled through the golden gate which enclosed Verduron. M. Le Varlon de Verrigny stretched his legs, adjusted his wig, and taking a plum from the basket which he had ordered placed before him on a bench, therewith to refresh himself along the way, he popped it all whole into his mouth. A juicy saliva foamed at his lips, and he raised his hand to command attention.

M. de Bréot in his turn chose a plum from the basket. He held it delicately between his fingers. It seemed as if it had been carved of cool agate. He sunk a fingernail into it.

"God, Monsieur," began M. Le Varlon de Verrigny, and through the open window of the coach he spat the plum stone, which gleamed all golden in the sunlight.

CHAPTER THREE

WHERE AND IN WHAT PECULIAR CIRCUMSTANCES MONSIEUR DE BRÉOT AGAIN ENCOUNTERED MONSIEUR LE VARLON DE VERRIGNY

SOME little time elapsed after the fête at Verduron before M. de Bréot again saw M. Le Varlon de Verrigny. He presented himself at the latter's residence situated at the tip of the Ile Saint Louis to thank the saintly gentleman for the trip to Paris in his coach and for the sound religious advice he had, between mouthfuls of plums, vouchsafed him during their ride together, but M. de Bréot had been informed that M. Le Varlon was away.

Of this extremely beautiful mansion owned by M. Le Varlon de Verrigny, M. de Bréot had therefore seen only its high windows and its ostentatious façade. It was rumored that in order to obtain sufficient money to build the house, M. Le Varlon had persuaded his younger sister Claudine to join her elder sister, who, under the name of Mother Julie Angélique was a professed nun of the order of Port Royal des Champs.

Claudine, without having much liking for the world, would not have dreamed of cutting herself off from it, had not her brother graphically represented its perils and dangers when one possesses, as she did, a pretty face and a timid disposition. The sermons of her pious brother were so lofty and eloquent, and the picture he drew of existing morality so horrifying, that she decided to take the veil of the Carmelites of Chaillot.

This splendid achievement was not one of the good deeds on which M. Le Varlon de Verrigny counted the least for counter-balancing his sins on the scales of God's justice. The Almighty could not help being grateful to M. Le Varlon for leading so spotless and undefiled a lamb to the foot of his divine altars. There she would stand interceding from morn to midnight for this hopeless sinner. M. Le Varlon felt deeply reassured at having an advocate in so advantageous a position whose pleas would to some extent recompense for the manifold sins and wickedness of a brother who deplored his backslidings but was himself helpless to arrest them. He had neglected no argument or pains to lead his sister to this holy but profitable resolution, and when he saw her in her cotta and cassock clamped behind the bars of the convent, he experienced a

solemn joy and returned thanks to heaven for having blessed him with a tongue so eloquent and efficacious as to lead this obedient lamb to the fold. With great satisfaction he recalled the harangue he had delivered whose examples, instances, and cases in point he had drawn from his own colored experience, for he knew better than anyone the dangers that lurked in leading the life of his century.

It was one of the most beautiful harangues M. Le Varlon de Verrigny had ever uttered and one with which he had been most pleased, although its audience had been only a simple girl incapable of fully admiring its art and its logic. Nevertheless, M. Le Varlon de Verrigny did not regret the genius he had expended, since he had received a just recompense for his labor. His sister thereafter would find herself protected from the evil and mischief of this world. In fact she had displayed such excellent judgment in her denial of all the goods and chattels of this mischievous world that with her own hand she had deeded over all principals, incomes and properties to a brother who was so tenderly solicitous in detaching her from all that is perishable in order that indissoluble ties might bind her to The Eternal, in whose breast we all find im-

mortality, for true existence is not within us but within God.

As his sister had desired to enter into her new state completely dismantled, it had been very necessary for M. Le Varlon to receive what, once the cloister gate closes, is mere dross in the eyes of those who renounce the pomps and vanities of this wicked world. Though he could have endowed some deserving institution with the proceeds, yet what slight virtue would this act possess in comparison with the one he had just accomplished? He therefore considered it more reasonable to employ this newly gleaned gold in erecting a house that would be worthy of his achievements and a lasting tribute to his success.

Accordingly M. Le Varlon de Verrigny did what he believed was most fitting. He built, then adorned his house with rare furniture and mirrors of a water-like clearness wherein he took great delight in admiring himself, without thinking too often that she to whom he owed this rare pleasure prayed kneeling upon the unyielding floor of the convent and slept wrapped in hair-cloth between the four walls of a cell.

All this seemed just as it should be and he lauded himself whenever his sister came into his thoughts

for that happy deed which not only had assured salvation for Claudine but had raised him in the estimation of his elder sister. For upon this occasion Mother Julie Angélique Le Varlon had rendered him a little of that approbation she had for so long refused to one entangled as he was in those snares of wickedness where man so easily jeopardizes his eternal future.

Mother Julie Angélique, haughty, obdurate, and one of the lights of Port Royal, did not consider it a simple matter to achieve salvation, nor that the world was a good place to attempt achieving it in. To reach Paradise she believed it was necessary not only to work over oneself unceasingly but that the struggle should be conducted in complete retirement and strict solitude. Devoutly penitent, she combined her humiliation with prayer and fasting and still did not remain less convinced that all these methods were inadequate in attaining success in this laborious undertaking without God's especial help and without the aid of his grace, which alone would not render our efforts and resolutions vain. She considered her brother as lost to eternity unless saved by some one of those miracles on which one must not generally count, for God does not ordinarily grant them to those who fail to entreat of

Celestial Parsimony and Divine Avarice with an ardor that nothing can cool.

Meanwhile the unexpected conduct of M. Le Varlon de Verrigny in leading his sister to the veil, or the veil to his sister, convinced Mother Julie Angélique that there was still some saving grace in this sinner and the spark of a slight hope that he might one day crawl out of his sink of iniquity. M. Le Varlon, in spite of his wickedness, was not what one might call an infidel, but rather a man who was shamefully carnal. If he did not observe God's commandments, he still preserved some fear of his judgments, since he did not fail to use a little caution toward Him who will judge us. Mother Julie Angélique thus assumed a little affection for her brother whom she had definitely decided to abandon on the road to hell, and M. Le Varlon soon became conscious of the rebirth of a new interest. However, he paid for it with a few disagreeable interviews in which Mother Julie Angélique attempted to open his eyes to the depravity of his condition.

It quite frequently happened that Mother Julie Angélique summoned her brother, which visits he never made without trembling all over, for these summons were only made when M. Le Varlon had

permitted the heat of his nature to lead him into too lively a prank. Mother Julie Angélique always possessed accurate information about it. Many artful and discreet persons, charged with this particular office, did not fail to keep her fully informed concerning this subject. Thereupon M. Le Varlon had to submit to stern remonstrances and lectures. The poor fellow did not attempt to escape them. With his tail between his legs he would clamber into his coach and order it to Les Champs. It was not without terror that he would behold the redoubtable Mother Julie Angélique before the grille of the receiving room with her yellow, angry face and the great red cross athwart her lank body. He bowed his head beneath the storm of opprobrium and did not raise it before hearing himself described in full detail as a miserable sinner dogged by the fires of Gehenna and true devil's game.

Like her brother, Mother Julie Angélique was naturally eloquent, and M. Le Varlon de Verrigny felt shudders ripple down his spine and sweat roll down his back at the pronouncement of torments awaiting him. To which blood-curdling descriptions Mother Julie Angélique had for some time appended sundry unkind remarks, such as warning the hopeless sinner that he was getting along in

years, that his age revealed itself in a shameful corpulence, that the claret-color of his face boded no good, that he had perhaps not much longer to lead his loose life, that some sudden and unexpected apoplexy of the brain certainly threatened to terminate it, that smitten thus death comes so unheralded that one has no time to acknowledge one's sins, to repent or confess them, and that it might very well be that he would pass directly from the sweets of sin to the bitterness of hell, and that this would not be due to the lack of having been warned.

These lectures made M. Le Varlon de Verrigny tremble to the soles of his shoes and were successful in cooling him down for a while. He would comport himself with more prudence and would avoid the crafts and assaults of Satan, but the devil speedily would put his efforts to rout. Satan knew how to trip up M. Le Varlon de Verrigny and presented many an opportunity to bring him back to his follies. A very little baiting sufficed and it was thus that M. Le Varlon, lured on by the tucked up petticoats of Mme. du Tronquoy, tumbled into the set trap of the grotto of sea shells.

It was returning from a lecture apropos this affair that he came across M. de Bréot. Mother

Julie Angélique had heard the tale of the grotto. Mme. de Gaillardin, who had been present there with Mme. du Tronquoy, but who had made good her escape, had recounted as much as she could. The ears of Mother Julie Angélique were, by the usual channel, apprized of it and M. Le Varlon received a summons which he had very much wished to ignore, but which he did not dare flee. The attack had been terrible and obstinate. Mother Julie Angélique reproached her brother less for the sin itself than for the circumstances under which it had been committed. The privacy of sheets and the secrecy of adulteresses would no longer suffice him. Hereafter he must make a show of his turpitude in open air and very soon he would invite the public to the spectacle of his transgressions. Mother Julie Angélique was admirable. She announced to M. Le Varlon de Verrigny that she had given up all hope of his ever mending his ways, that the Devil no longer only prowled near him, but was in his belly like the swine mentioned in scripture, and she shut the grille in his face with such violence that he stood there stupefied with horror.

He was still slightly stunned when M. de Bréot saw him coming along a little side lane off the Cours la Reine. M. Le Varlon de Verrigny, having

descended from his coach, was pacing slowly along endeavoring to regain his spirits. M. de Bréot remarked upon his air of discomfiture and his hang-dog expression.

"Ah! Monsieur," said M. Le Varlon de Verrigny, greeting him with a sigh, "you see a man loaded with utter grief and despair, and mine is caused by no one else but myself. Do not be astonished to find me brimming over with bitterness. How painful it is to feel one's will power sickening and no longer be able to restore its health."

And M. Le Varlon de Verrigny made a gesture with his flabby hand.

"I may tell you," he continued, "as you yourself have borne witness, that even in my worst whoredoms I still possessed the desire to rise above them, but I confess that now I seem to have lost this energy which was as the ultimate virtue of my weakness and the last step of my downfall. I have even come to regret believing in God, for since I am vested with nothing which might deserve his mercy, there is nothing left for me but to bow to his judgment."

M. Le Varlon de Verrigny lapsed into a moment's silence before continuing.

"If, however, I were a man of your convictions,

that is to say, a frank and unblushing infidel, I could find reasons to live as I please. Liberated from the pangs and qualms of the conscience I could freely follow my instincts and I could accept them simply as the inevitable trend and direction of my nature. I would no longer think of resisting them any more than I would think of regretting the consequences. What comfort, what bliss would I enjoy at every moment! And is this not exactly your state of beatitude, if the lecture I delivered the other day in my coach failed to undermine those convictions of yours which I disapprove of, but which assure you, I must confess, that inner peace I have observed in you and that I observe in you still?"

M. de Bréot having admitted that his convictions were unchanged, that he had not altered his attitude toward those questions which he had settled once and for all, M. Le Varlon de Verrigny with another sigh took up the thread of his discourse.

"You are a fortunate man, Monsieur, and permit me to admire you as one so firm in his beliefs that nothing can ever trouble them. Yes, you are always free to live according to your own sweet will. You can be, just as the occasion may require, choleric, avaricious, gluttonous, or concupiscent. You can

put your body to whatever use may please you at the moment, assured that no one will demand an accounting of its actions when it has lost the power of performing any. For, Monsieur, it is this belief of yours that endows you with a contempt for all constraint and affords you an excuse for the dangerous immunity in which you indulge. But as for me!"

And M. Le Varlon de Verrigny raised his arms and let them fall in discouragement.

"If I were only your age, Monsieur," said he, lowering his voice and glancing furtively about him, "I fear I would not promise not to shake off these beliefs of mine which eternally constrict my life and sour its sweetest moments. But my life has too little chance now of lasting long enough to make a reformation of its fundamental precepts worth the trouble. I should have undertaken such a reformation during my youth. To what purpose would I convert myself to free-thought at this late hour? Nevertheless I feel I would have slight difficulty in doing so today, for though I am very much vexed with myself, I am hardly satisfied with The Almighty, Monsieur. For in truth, is it not a strange sign of his goodness, this refusal to aid man in the struggle against those passions whose real author

is the Author of all things and particularly of our bodies whose inordinate and sinful affections he refuses to aid us in controlling? Yes, I am enraged at being forced to answer for my body in that day when God takes it from me, without his ever having permitted me to use it peacefully and without ever having succored me in those perils to which the pricks and spurs of desire goad it on. For if I did not have the fear of hell-fire in my heart, these goadings would be merely an attractive summons to pleasure."

"Why then," observed M. de Bréot, after a moment of silence, "have you not tried to root out this thing within you which causes your unhappiness: —I do not mean 'these pricks and spurs of desire,' but on the contrary, this false certainty you cherish that they work for your eternal damnation. Do you really believe that religion is natural to man, and that it is not merely an appearance due to the fact that we have been taught to think of it as natural? Would we really think of it as indispensable if we had not been taught from childhood that we cannot exist without it? It seems to me that we owe our belief in God to others rather than to ourselves and that, since one can be taught it, one can also forget it. Thus, Monsieur, as during our return

from Verduron in your coach you undertook to supply me something that in your opinion I lacked, why should I not attempt in my own turn to relieve you of what, according to your own admission, is not only intolerable but is only of use in tormenting you in your pleasures without being able to curb you in your instincts? Do not believe, however, that I would assume a task whose difficulties I can imagine, but I do know someone who would marvelously well discharge himself of such instruction and might perhaps place you in a condition to slough off these vexatious beliefs that fetter your life. He is, Monsieur, one of our best Libertines. He argues expertly. Although this is not his profession I doubt not that he will instruct you in this matter we are considering, and I am certain that you will pass from his hands completely stripped of those chains which were not forged for men of your kidney and of which you have not the slightest need."

M. Le Varlon de Verrigny's face greatly amused M. de Bréot, who thereon read a curiosity to essay this singular remedy, struggling with a hesitation to risk it. The conflict endowed his features with successive expressions of doubt, longing and confusion. Finally he asked M. de Bréot the name of this

inverted catechist and was informed that it was M. Floreau de Bercaillé.

"Do not permit yourself, Monsieur, to reject him on appearances," cautioned M. de Bréot, when M. Le Varlon de Verrigny had objected to M. Floreau de Bercaillé on account of the position he occupied in society. "And remember that the Gentiles received their faith from poor folk. Feet clad in crude sandals brought the world what for a long time has been called the Truth, and let me send you this ragged apostate who, for a bit of silver will tell you those admirable truths which will put your mind at peace."

* * *

When M. Le Varlon de Verrigny had, half-serious and half-laughing, agreed upon a day for the apostatical visitation of M. de Bercaillé and had reentered his coach, M. de Bréot continued to observe the passersby. There were throngs strolling along the Cours that day, and M. de Bréot recognized many personages of importance whom he knew by sight. The old Maréchal de Serpières showed his wrinkled face at the window of his coach. The Prince de Thuines rode by. M. de Bréot noted his proud and insolent profile to which a smile contributed a sharp, an almost mordant charm. And

M. de Bréot could not help thinking that all this world of men who came and went lived untroubled in this same sin for which the poor M. Le Varlon de Verrigny tortured himself. For in truth, is not taking pleasure in one's body an occupation common to everyone? Is it not for the attainment of this pleasure that both men and women adorn themselves, bow, smirk, jostle, and make compliments to each other? Is there any sin to which one assents so readily as that of the flesh? And although one hesitates to confess himself brutal, avaricious, or envious, does not one openly pretend to be gallant, a rake, a whoremonger? Even though the scrupulous or nice cover their lewdness with a mask of love, does this sham deceive anyone? The most delicate, like the most gross, always end at the same point. Thus did he find M. Le Varlon de Verrigny throwing up great obstacles in the path of so common and so attractive a pleasure, a pleasure that appeared only a natural function to M. de Bréot, for it is Nature herself who demands it and supplies us the means. M. de Bréot had more than once received this command of Nature and he recalled in particular the recent desire he had experienced at the fete of Verduron before the charming Mme. de Blionne, dancing in the ballet

of Fauns among verdure and lights, clothed in her robe of silver which transformed her into the Nymph of the Fountains. Once more imagining her naked and dripping beneath her transparent gown he felt a little shudder of longing spread through his blood.

As M. de Bréot had often thought of Mme. de Blionne since that evening, he did not leave the Cours la Reine before assuring himself that her coach was not there. He had met her only once since that night and though a mask of velvet covered her face he had not been prevented from recognizing her by her bearing and her step.

In this revery, M. de Bréot turned his steps homeward, remembering that he had promised M. Le Varlon de Verrigny that as soon as possible he would send M. Floreau de Bercaillé to him. But the amusement he felt at the idea of these consultations, in which M. Floreau de Bercaillé would marshall forth his best arguments, did not succeed in dissipating this amorous melancholia. Entering the lute-makers' shop, there to purchase a string for his lute, he did not give his customary care to the selection, but took without any considerable attention the catgut the fair Marguerite Géraud, mistress at the sign

of the Silver Lute, gave him with a smile and a curtsy.

M. de Bréot lodged in a house on Rue du Petit Musc. Its façade was narrow, high and shabby, but the use of a little garden in the rear of the house led M. de Bréot to bear with sundry neighbors, the least pleasant of whom was a certain couple called the Courboins, who occupied rooms just above his own. Papa Courboin and his wife were second hand dealers, principally of discarded clothes and worn finery. At their establishment one could replenish one's wardrobe at a slight expense, for among all their frippery there was the wherewithal to cloth oneself well, for what to one half of the world is outworn or outmoded is just right for the other half to make use of. Papa Courboin was an expert in fitting you out. He was an ugly man, crooked and blear-eyed, while his wife was cunning and shrewish. Their business attracted every kind and condition of men to the house and of such a low order of respectability were most of them that M. de Bréot never left his door unlocked, nor his chests open, for they held his clothing, his linen, and his innumerable lutes, one lute of inlaid wood being particularly dear to him.

It was this lute that he drew from its case to

string with the catgut he had just bought at the lute-makers, and which he was planning to play in the little garden. M. de Bréot loved to sit there in the twilight, although the place was melancholy and hemmed in by its high walls and scrawny trees whose leaves had begun to strew the damp paths. September had come to an end. More than a month had passed since the fete of Verduron. M. de Bréot plucked the moaning strings. Anew the image of Mme. de Blionne rose before him, charming, silvery, naked. He raised his eyes and in place of this radiant vision he saw a little girl who stood watching him. She was the daughter of the Courboins. At the oldest she could not be more than fifteen years. She was slender, with a pale, thin face. She wore a dress that was far too wide and too long for her narrow waist and her lank body, for the Courboins dressed her in their own cast-off clothing. She was called Annette and she often came to hear M. de Bréot play his lute. She stood before him, silent and attentive.

M. Floreau de Bercaillé who often prinked himself out at the Courboins' with a little linen and other finery when Mme. la marquise de Preignelay was tardy in renewing them, had one day discovered M. de Bréot in her company. His presence

having put the girl to flight, M. de Bercaillé had slyly complimented M. de Bréot on his pupil.

M. de Bréot had shrugged his shoulders, but M. Floreau de Bercaillé had replied with a laugh that he knew more than one man to whom these narrow breasts and lean body would not be unalluring, that it did not concern him, but it was something well worth suggesting, and he departed muttering between his teeth.

* * *

M. Floreau de Bercaillé did not receive eagerly the offer M. de Bréot made him to act as tutor to M. Le Varlon de Verrigny in the experiment the latter wished to perform on his soul. M. de Bercaillé in his garret, completely surrounded by vials and jars, was in a bad enough humor. M. and Mme. de Preignelay did not escape his bile. He taxed them with the many unpleasantnesses that had descended upon him since the fete at Verduron, the most painful being that of the little servant girl with whom M. de Bréot had discovered him in bed and who, under a semblance of sound flesh, concealed a fire which was costing M. de Bercaillé a great deal of money in drugs and medicines to extinguish. The purse M. and Mme. de Preignelay had paid him for his ballet of Fauns had been an extremely light one.

The upper class had certainly become tight-fisted. M. de Bercaillé roundly cursed his muse which scarcely fed its own votary and did not even furnish him with the wherewithal to heal his ills. He declared himself disgusted to the verge of puking.

"Ah! the high and mighty! The high and mighty!" he exclaimed to M. de Bréot as with a wry face he gulped down a decoction of bitter herbs. "They never realize what one sacrifices for them. I do not know this Le Varlon de Verrigny you mention and who, you say, must hire me to teach him how to live according to Nature. But do you for a moment imagine that when I have struck off the shackles that bind him, that he will remember the service I shall have rendered? He will cross my palm with the proper silver, but will he remember what he owes to one who teaches him how to be a true Libertine? No, when I have converted him from religion to free thought, he will boast of having done so himself and will bestow all thanks for it upon himself. However, this ingratitude does not vex me and I will not regret having communicated to him the knowledge which I shall be happy to unload to his profit. The profession of apostasy is no longer worth anything, and the time will come when it may be necessary for me

to believe in God, and it might well come to pass that you may see the day when I will. Whereof I hope, Monsieur, if once I do, that I will believe in religion as much as the next person."

M. de Bréot having complimented M. Floreau de Bercaillé upon the new tendency and having informed him of M. Le Varlon de Verrigny's address, he departed. He was depressed that man's follies did not divert him as they had done in the past, but the thought of Mme. de Blionne continued to torment him, particularly when he learned a few days later that M. de Blionne, in spite of the late season, was taking his wife to their estate where they would pass the winter. M. de Bréot pictured the charming Nymph of the Fountains, a prisoner of neglect and cold weather, naked under her silvery robe, as if frozen in a crystal block of ice.

The time came for the departure of Mme. de Blionne, before M. de Bréot found an opportunity to visit either M. Le Varlon de Verrigny or M. Floreau de Bercaillé and learn the issue of the venture in which he had embroiled them. The month of October was rainy and M. de Bréot hardly left his rooms. He worried about the muddy roads where Mme. de Blionne's coach swayed in the ruts. To distract his thoughts from these worries or perhaps

rather to accompany them, M. de Bréot played his lute by the window opening upon the little garden, for the weather was still mild and the last swallows wheeled in the gray skies.

One afternoon while occupied at this pastime he observed from his window M. Floreau de Bercaillé who, at the farther side of the garden was conversing with Papa Courboin. Doubtless he was coming to terms on the price of some old clothes, and M. de Bréot was about to call to him to ask news of M. Le Varlon de Verrigny, when M. de Bercaillé abruptly disappeared leaving Papa Courboin bowing to earth as to someone to whom he had the honor of selling something more than a few pieces of old toggery. M. de Bréot closed his window, as the evening was cool, and placed his lute in its case. It had failed to console him, but the next day he returned to it, seeking relief from his sadness when he heard a scratching at his door. Little Annette Courboin entered and without a word sat down before him. M. de Bréot noted the changed expression of her face and her eyes which seemed on the point of shedding tears. Little by little evening descended. He ceased to play. The girl sighed in the darkness. It seemed as if she were about to speak to him when she leaped at the sound of her

mother's voice calling her from the head of the stairs and she slipped out of the room without uttering a word.

Alone, M. de Bréot suddenly remembered he had promised Mme. la Marquise de Preignelay a sheaf of music. When he returned, having supped at a tavern upon a chicken and a bottle of wine, the night was black and the curfew had long since rung. M. de Bréot was preparing to retire when he believed he heard footsteps outside. He quietly opened his window, which overlooked the garden. Two people were standing there in deep conversation, and although they spoke in low voices, M. de Bréot imagined he recognized the voice of M. Floreau de Bercaillé as one of them. After an exchange of a few indistinct words the two men separated.

M. de Bréot left the window and hastened to his door. Footsteps were mounting the stairs. M. de Bréot, peering through the keyhole, saw the visitor pass. He was a stout man, muffled in a dark cloak, with a hat pulled down over his eyes. A taper-candle held in someone's hand above the balusters proved that they were awaiting this late visitor upstairs.

M. de Bréot, too deeply puzzled to return to his bed, sat down in a chair and waited for a little

while. Without doubt the Courboins were negotiating some important business that required secrecy. Reaching this decision he was about to retire, when he heard a heavy though stealthy tread immediately above him. Then suddenly came a strangled cry, followed by another. In spite of the thickness of the ceiling, he distinctly recognized the voice of Annette. The sound continued. It was that of a struggle. Someone was running about the room. There was a crash of overturned furniture. The moaning began again, became muffled, and died away.

M. de Bréot flew up the stairs. With one thrust of his shoulder he burst in the window light of the Courboins' door. The worthy couple were seated on two bales of rags with a candle smoking between them on a stool. At sight of M. de Bréot, they rose as if to bar him the way. With a blow of his fist he sent them flying into a pile of rags, the woman on her stomach, the man on his rump. In falling Papa Courboin let a fistful of gold fly from his hand and scatter over the floor. Without paying more attention to his adversaries, M. de Bréot seized the candle and rushed on.

A solitary taper dimly lighted the room he entered. On a disordered bed, lay a body at full length

revealing the lean and angular nakedness of Annette. Her hair, neatly combed in a chignon was still undisturbed. Her slim legs were trembling and her knees chattered together with a little dry sound. M. de Bréot drew near her. The girl opened her eyes. Revivified she gathered the torn linen of her shift around her and with her legs hanging over the edge of the bed, she sat up, shaking with great sobs and leaning forward with her face in her hands so that the bony ridges of her spine jutted out beneath her flesh.

M. de Bréot glanced around him. In one corner of the room stood a stout man with his face glued to the wall. Frightened, woe-begone, and trembling, he turned with clasped hands and in the candle light M. de Bréot recognized in this familiar posture, M. Le Varlon de Verrigny. He stood as M. de Bréot had once before seen him, with his wig askew, his shirt rumpled, and his flushed, sweating, heavy face completely bewildered by lust, surprise, and fear.

Meanwhile the Courboins, having gathered themselves together, had stuck their noses in at the door. M. de Bréot stepped toward them. The Courboins harkened to him with hanging heads. Annette, who had ceased to weep, listened attentively to the coun-

cil. When he had finished with them, M. de Bréot returned to M. Le Varlon de Verrigny and made a sign for him to follow. The stout man obeyed docilely. Arriving in M. de Bréot's room he sank down on a chest. He did not glance toward M. de Bréot, who stood before him in silence, but bending forward with his two hands resting on his knees, he riveted his eyes to the floor. He would have remained there indefinitely had M. de Bréot not drawn him from his reflections with a:

"Well, my monsieur Le Varlon de Verrigny?"

The stout man raised his puffy hands and letting them fall, replied in a choking voice:

"No longer address me by that name, Monsieur, for it stands for someone I have ceased to be, a someone who will evermore be a subject of horror and revulsion to me."

And he added with remorse:

"For he whom you name, Monsieur, is indeed he whom you discovered a moment ago, not only under circumstances unworthy of a man and shameful to a Christian, but under those of a veritable criminal whose case is a matter for the public courts."

M. de Bréot made a gesture of acquiescence.

"However," continued M. Le Varlon de Ver-

rigny, "it is not the courts of man that I count upon punishing me. I know them too well not to realize that they decline to chastise many a culpable wretch, and I do not wish to be treated indulgently. I dread the leniency of man's courts. Moreover it is to the courts of God that I apply, for his court considers neither the state nor condition of anyone;—we are all equal before his judgments and his wrath. It is therefore to his hands that I commit myself."

"Do not believe, Monsieur," he continued after a pause, "that a hardened infidel or an inveterate atheist appears before him. No. Your Floreau de Bercaillé with all his lectures could achieve nothing. He spared me neither logic nor apologues; he drove his talents to the very limit. It is not due to him that I became the firmest of Libertines. It is not, however, that which I owe him, for I have profited less by his teaching than by his complaisancy. It is this complaisancy of his, Monsieur, which led me to this place. He believed in leading me only to pleasure, or at least to what, in my turpitude, seemed to me such. But the ways of Providence are mysterious and impenetrable. God made use of a little girl whom M. de Bercaillé turned up in an attic to destroy the old Adam in me, for he is

well done away with, Monsieur, and by a great and unexpected miracle."

M. Le Varlon de Verrigny remained silent a moment.

"For in truth, not less than some astonishing combination of events was necessary to help me out of the sink of iniquity into which I ceaselessly fell. You have seen me floundering there twice, and today under particularly shameful circumstances. May that spectacle at least be an example to you. Learn thereby whither this appetite for women can lead one; this appetite which you consider a result of Nature and about which I have heard you make jokes. Know to what violence and to what fury it can lead a man, and how it can transform us into what you saw it transform me."

M. de Bréot continued patiently listening to M. Le Varlon de Verrigny.

"Yes, Monsieur, I hoped to satisfy this appetite modestly and discreetly when Monsieur Floreau de Bercaillé, betwixt two arguments of his demonstration, described the daughter of these two honest people. Since I could not pluck out the thorn rankling in my loins, was it not preferable to avoid making a scandal of my sin? You know the regrettable reports circulated after my adventure in the

grotto with Mme. du Tronquoy. Since my appetite was more powerful than I, it seemed to me wiser not to make a public incident of it. The business, as Monsieur de Bercaillé proposed it to me, seemed discreet and proper. I agreed to follow him, and at this moment he awaits me in my coach hardly suspecting the place whither he is to accompany me when I leave here."

M. Le Varlon de Verrigny took a breath.

"In arriving here a short while ago, he left me in the hands of these honest people to whom I counted out the sum of money agreed upon. They assured me that all would be well, that the little party in question had been apprised of my intended visit, that toward me she was in the best of dispositions, and that I could not fail being satisfied with her if I would but forgive a certain lack of knowledge her youthfulness made pardonable. It was with these words they opened the door of the room in which you found me. It was dimly lighted by a single candle. With measured step I drew near the bed. The little party was asleep, and slumbered so deeply that I was able without waking her to draw back the sheet and raise the little frock that covered her. Her body lay there revealed. It was neither beautiful nor provocative. I considered

it at length. The girl seemed altogether too young, too foreign to my taste and I was, perhaps, on the point of withdrawing, when I imprudently carried my hand where even my eyes would not have dared to linger.

"At that instant, Monsieur, I felt overrun by a sudden warmth. A fire flamed within me. The little one had just awakened. She displayed no surprise at my presence, of which she certainly had been forewarned, and she smiled at me gently, but blushed to see herself uncovered and quickly thrust down her nightgown. I then hazarded a few familiarities, but to my utter amazement she repulsed them so energetically that I attempted more. She defended herself and prayed me in a low voice to go, but this entreaty, which could have been pure dissimulation, had the effect of further emboldening me as I was persuaded that this was not the lass's true initiation. I also wished to complete the affair with dispatch. It was then that she began to scream and to call for help. These cries, instead of cooling me, inflamed me the more. I had seized hold of her, but she struggled so effectively that she slipped from between my arms and began rushing about the room. The pursuit was hot. Finally I caught hold of her shift and we fell together on the bed. Very

earnestly now did she cry for help. What could I have done, Monsieur, but grasp her throat? Little by little her defenses gave way. I pressed her body beneath mine. She stared at me with wide eyes. Ah! Monsieur, what an experience! I felt her melt beneath me, as I felt myself melting within her, but in proportion as I penetrated her with the very substance and matter of my sin it seemed to me that her face was transformed into something appalling. It was no longer a human face, but a diabolic mask which offered its horrible aspect to my eyes. The very face of a Demon, Monsieur, and this Demon was that which inhabited my body and which appeared before me visible in all its hideousness. I felt coursing through my veins the fires of hell, of which I was, Monsieur, the flaming fountain and the burning jet."

M. Le Varlon de Verrigny had risen, all breathless and puffing with sin. His shadow, projected upon the wall by the light of the candle, was deformed and terrifying. M. de Bréot remained silent, while M. Le Varlon de Verrigny took up his story with renewed exaltation:

"It was then, Monsieur, it was then that the miracle of my reconciliation with God was made manifest. The ways of Providence are impene-

trable. It was necessary that I reach this point of turpitude and ignominy to prove that without God, man can do naught for himself. It is thus that the sovereign Master of our terrestrial fate, as of our eternal one, permitted me to sink to the level of brute beasts. My hands clutched; my fingernails clawed. God willed that I should assume this degraded posture that his light and mercy be visited upon me. Ah! Monsieur, will you believe it if I tell you? At that awful moment it seemed that my sin departed never to return. I was, so to speak, purged of it. Evicted by my flesh and engulfed by the flesh of another, I was purified. There remained with me only horror, lassitude, and fatigue."

And M. Le Varlon de Verrigny stretched his heavy and weary legs.

"I spoke the truth to you a moment ago. Yes, your eyes no longer behold that Monsieur Le Varlon whom you formerly knew as a rake and a whoremonger. It is a different man who speaks to you and who remembers the former one only to weep burning tears of shame for him, for though this newly delivered man is still loaded with iniquity, he has sincerely resolved to obtain forgiveness for his sins and to that end to lead a life of repentance, permitting no suffering or tribulation to swerve

him from his resolve. This resolution is not what you may believe it is. Do not interpret it as that temporary and transient repentance the sinner often experiences between disgust for the sin committed and the desire to commit it again. No. I am firm in my resolution and completely assured of my future. Nevertheless, whatever my confidence and certainty in my new condition may be, do not imagine that I will jeopardize it to the perils and mischief of this world. It is to solitude that I plan to retire. You will tell me, perhaps, that I might not have waited so long; that I might have profited already by a brief retirement. Alas! would you have had me then soil my retreat with the filth of my thoughts? I would have peopled my solitude with the lusts of my flesh, while now I will bring only the shell of a body whose seeds of evil are dried up and can germinate no more. For such is the miracle of this night. Sin has cast up its last flame within me and has flickered out in its own ashes. Moreover, I have chosen the place of my retreat. It is to Port Royal des Champs my awaiting coach will take me. You are doubtless cognizant of the saintly reputation of that sanctuary. Among those Anchorites, he who was Monsieur Le Varlon de Verrigny in this world will undertake to render him-

self worthy of the grace God has this night vouchsafed him. And I pray, Monsieur, that he will one day render his grace to you in a like miracle, for what would we be if he did not take part in the struggle against our own inordinate and sinful affections?"

M. Le Varlon de Verrigny ceased speaking. M. de Bréot snuffed the guttering candle. On the floor above there was no longer any sound. The little rainy garden dripped softly in the darkness.

"Upon my word, Monsieur," M. de Bréot replied after a moment, "all this seems excellent, except perhaps for this little girl whom Providence seems to have treated so cavalierly and who was certainly not worthy of causing such great changes and mutations. I would only add that I envy you for having God to forgive you for something I would find great difficulty in forgiving myself. But it is hardly possible that such a forgiveness will ever be necessary for if I consider it natural for men to take pleasure in women, I nevertheless insist that they also desire what we desire of them. By this I mean that we should submit no one to coercion, either by trickery, or by gold, or by violence. Beyond which, Monsieur, it seems to me that one can live as he pleases and play the lute when he cares to."

And M. de Bréot noticing his lute lying forgotten on the table, carefully placed it in its case, while Le Varlon de Verrigny, slightly astonished that this little Libertine from the provinces had not displayed more admiration for someone played upon with so much dash and delicacy by the fingers of divine Grace, pulled up his hose, tucked in his shirt, and having bowed good evening to M. de Bréot, went forth with a solemn tread to meet his God.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHAT MONSIEUR HERBOU THE CONTRACTOR PURPOSED DOING AND WHAT HE PROPOSED TO MONSIEUR DE BRÉOT

THE Marquise de Preignelay pronounced herself wholly satisfied with little Annette Courboin whom M. de Bréot had placed in her ladyship's service to protect the girl from the generosity of her parents. This worthy couple agreed without any great show of reluctance to the suggestion of M. de Bréot. In fact, they appeared very much abashed by the circumstances attending the nocturnal visit of M. Le Varlon de Verrigny and they also seemed to realize that it is not so easy as one might generally suppose to remedy the insufficiency of our condition by every resource Providence offers us. Though the venture had yielded the comfortable sum of money M. Le Varlon de Verrigny had granted them, yet their ears still rang with the good advice M. de Bréot had not spared. He had given them to understand that Lieutenants of Police frowned upon a commerce of the kind they

had essayed, and he had made this fact so clear to them that the two Courboins were entirely disposed henceforth to eschew it. They appeared resigned to the belief that God willed they should employ themselves only in selling rags and old clothes rather than attempting to increase their worldly wealth by more direct and more lucrative paths. For these reasons they readily permitted M. de Bréot to take their daughter Annette to the Marquise de Preignelay. For the girl could render daily service in the divers and sundry preparations her ladyship employed to properly receive the court and the city, for Her Grace did not wish her appearance to repel those who were attracted by the charm of her wit.

As she required someone to help her in these preparations, Annette Courboin had then to learn how to dress her mistresses's hair and lay out her clothes, how to slip on her shift or hand her her stockings, in fact how to make herself generally useful, in exchange for which Annette was to receive bed, board, and an *ecu* each month. At the end of a short time she performed her little duties exceedingly well. She became plump, flourishing, and even slightly pretty, which the Marquise observing felt it advisable to have the girl sleep in a

room adjoining her own. At night she placed the key to this room under her pillow for she intended that nothing untoward should occur. She was also careful to keep young Annette beyond range of lackeys and porters since, as she justly observed to M. de Bréot, the girl did not have the air of regretting as much as she might the misfortune of having been ravished less than two months before.

"Yes, Monsieur," said the Marquise, "not as much as she might and not even as much as she should! Of course I also believe that it is nothing more than natural that such an experience should end, after having been of considerable importance, by fusing with the little events which compose the ordinary warp and woof of life. Is it not proper that it should take its place in her memory and no longer be distinguished from what surrounds it? I readily agree that for a misfortune of this kind one need not hang one's head and weep continually, but neither do I wish to see one take on airs and make a show of it. Though your Annette does not do this to excess, I nevertheless affirm that she reflects upon what happened to her without any too great a displeasure and when she passes me my stockings or my shift she glances at me with a slight air of importance which seems to say that I, forsooth,

have not had the honor of being man-handled by a certain Monsieur Le Varlon de Verrigny, gentleman and advocate in the *Grand Conseil*. . . . "

M. Herbou the Contractor, who with M. de Bréot was sitting in the bed-chamber of the Marquise de Preignelay, broke into peals of laughter which was accompanied by the gentler laughter of M. de Bréot.

"Are you two gentlemen not ashamed," began the Marquise, "to indulge in what I certainly consider an immoderate laughter? For it rises I am certain, as much from amusement at the naive arrogance of this girl, as from an attitude of derision toward this poor Monsieur Le Varlon. However, Messieurs, if you would honestly consider the source of your gaiety I do not doubt that you would blush for it. Its immediate cause is a tableau that has nothing beautiful or sublime about it. You laugh at something whose very notion you should find offensive. To make it such it would simply be necessary to suddenly transform what is for you only a laughable idea, into a living reality. Submitted to such a test would you continue to make merry over the clumsy or brutal means a man on such occasions employs to encompass his ends? Indeed, it is exactly this brutality you find amusing now. You

picture Monsieur Le Varlon de Verrigny in a posture whose repulsiveness you would not tolerate for a moment if you were to witness it. I see you both rushing to save the victim! And is this not exactly what you did, Monsieur de Bréot? Yes, here we have man's mind revealed! His mind is feeble and ill retains the impressions it has received. Even the most vivid impressions soon fade. There is a certain distance at which our impressions take on an aspect very dissimilar to that which they at first seemed to possess, and what we retain of them is in no way related to what they should be if our memory faithfully cherished what our eyes beheld. Is it not something comparable to the facility with which we forgive ourselves for certain deeds that would without the shadow of a doubt appear unworthy of us, if remoteness and our indifference, hastening to exile them, did not substitute for their true aspect something which is merely a mask or a disguise?"

"I have often observed," M. de Bréot put in timidly, "that words themselves do not always retain the full implications of their meaning. That is why a virtuous and upright man often speaks of the vilest and most atrocious deeds with a freedom which should not indicate that he is capable of

committing them himself, nor a proof that he does not abhor them. This habit, which is not a good one, causes one to note certain details of a man's conversation that might lead to a belief that he is less delicate and more wicked than he really is. More than one man who speaks off-hand of fighting and killing has probably no desire to do either and would be very much astonished if someone placed a sword or a quarter-staff in his hand to use in the manner he so freely recommended. Who in a bad humor has not often wished the devil to carry off his best friends, but yet would hang onto their coat tails did the devil's fork at once set to work accomplishing his desire?"

"That is entirely true," replied M. Herbou, "but you must admit that the contrary is not less so. For if certain words no longer preserve with their meaning that strict relation which should connect them to it and render them exact in their usage; if they have lost thereby the effect they should have upon us, there are also among words those which separated from their exact meaning, imply more to him who does not take the trouble to read between the lines or consider the real meaning they conceal. One has established once for all that they are bad and one no longer cares to consider them

again except perhaps to agree that upon investigating them more sharply they might have a better character than they have the air of having. I will add that of these words so decried all do not deserve it with equal justice. If they all stood for actions criminal in themselves it would still be necessary to consider the circumstances under which these actions were committed. I certainly admit that one ought never to attempt rape upon a person and that it is not a pretty sight, for it requires a series of gestures and grimaces whose spectacle cannot please us, at least when they are performed by others. Yet before condemning it altogether would it not be proper to discover if these kinds of physical violence find no excuse in the propensity we all possess and that in order to condemn so general a practice and to attach a universal opprobrium to its name, would it not be better to assure ourselves that of the two people indispensable in its consummation, one has had no excuses to plead for giving way to it while the other has had to suffer as much as one commonly believes? But this certainly does not strike me as being the case of your little Annette, since she displays as you say less remorse than . . . "

M. Herbou did not complete his sentence, for the

Marquise de Preignelay interrupted him with asperity.

"Ah, Monsieur, how can you speak with so much levity of an event whose aftermath is so important, not for this little girl who, once the few moments have been endured, has gained, I admit, more good than harm from it; but for this unfortunate Monsieur Le Varlon de Verrigny? I do not mean to imply that he himself did not derive some advantage, since this adventure will have doubtless gained him his eternal salvation; nevertheless he has been placed in the painful situation of a man brusquely wrenched from the arms of society and flung by the grace of God into solitude where he performs the most rigorous acts of penitence, for his sister, Mother Julie Angélique is there to direct all its details. You may be assured that she spares nothing to render it as it should be. As a matter of truth, our unfortunate friend need not have enclosed himself in a retreat to placidly terminate an existence already purified by what ordinarily leads one to resolutions similar to his own. He has done everything himself, and it is a large task that of regenerating oneself anew and completely. Moreover, is it not a proof of the excellence of our religion that even in this sinner it has kept its roots sound enough

to bring forth from this mud the thorny flower of repentance? Should this not lead impious Libertines like you to reflection, for does it not prove that even in all your hardness of heart you are not fortified as well as you may believe against sudden visitations of divine grace?"

"Speak to M. de Bréot, your ladyship," replied M. Herbou the Contractor, "and not to me. They say M. de Bréot is a freethinker, which might very well be the truth, but does not one find in him something rather more pagan than atheistic? I suspect him less of disbelief in God that of a veneration for more occult deities. He loves the fables of poets and he draws from his lute a music that must flatter the ear of Apollo. Is he not a votary of those Gods of fields and forests, of Naiades and Nymphs who inhabit brooks and fountains? Is that not so, Monsieur de Bréot?"

M. de Bréot blushed secretly without replying. He wondered if M. Herbou spoke by chance or if his words contained some allusion to the Nymph of the Fountains who at Verduron had appeared under the charming guise of Mme. de Blionne. Though M. de Bréot had confided in no one concerning the emotion he felt for her, he could not avoid asking everyone about Mme. de Blionne. He had made dis-

creet inquiries concerning her character and her manner of life. Perhaps he had not sufficiently dissembled the admiration he cherished for so much grace and beauty. But M. Herbou, without heeding his blushes or revery, now turned to the Marquise.

"As for me, your Grace must forever abandon counting me among the Libertines, for so far as I am concerned I accept with closed eyes all the dogmas of our religion. However, I lay claim to no credit for doing so. I have too special and too personal an interest for believing in God, and I should like to meet anyone with presumption enough to say there is no future life and I would certainly put any man in his place who tried to prove it to me."

M. Herbou with his delicate hand made a threatening gesture toward anyone imprudent enough to do so.

"Yes, your Grace," he continued, as he watched M. de Bréot with eyes glittering with mischievous fire, "yes, such is the case, and you must confess that I would be very stupid to wish that it were otherwise."

M. Herbou, after lapsing for a moment into silence, continued with conviction:

"You can easily understand my reasons if you will honor me by following them. I was not born as

you now see me, well-dressed and in a position to cut a figure. I have not climbed to the point where I am, except by ceaseless efforts and pains. But yet, whatever position I may have, I certainly do not intend to remain satisfied with it. Is it everything to be merely rich, even though many people are content with what impresses me as being the least a man like me can desire? No, no! I have certain small ambitions that I very much hope to realize, but however and how shrewdly I may attempt to realize them, it is not certain that I will succeed though I exert every effort in their behalf. Failure would certainly be intolerable, and for this reason I have taken precautions. I have cut a wide swathe in this world, your Grace, and I would be disconsolate if at the end of so beautiful a harvest I should find only a black hole to lie in, silent and colorless, for all eternity. No, by God's grace, no! It cannot be, for I have greater need than anyone of a future world since it will help me to secure what I will not be able to secure in this one."

And with these words M. Herbou assumed an expression of humble sincerity.

"Indeed, your Grace, I am not satisfied with my position here. It might satisfy someone who only demands his money's worth. My wealth has ren-

dered me every blessing of which it is capable, but in spite of it I realize the blemish of my lowly birth still predominates. As well disposed as are those people of quality who would honor me with their kindness, they nevertheless have no little trouble in treating me as one of themselves. Though I should live to a hundred years, I would not succeed in removing from their minds the conviction of this difference which seems all the more important to them as it appears less important to me. And it is just here that God answers my purposes so well that I would be a fool not to believe in him. What place is more qualified to put an end to these inequalities I refer to than God's heaven? Do you imagine that among his elect terrestrial origins are considered? Only an ineluctable fraternity can prevail among them, as between the sons of a common father. Moreover, in the next world I will meet on the same level those who in this one hesitate to bow to me or do it with the air of saying, I' faith, if it is not good Monsieur Herbou the Contractor!' May they make haste on earth to enjoy their last little pleasures! It is on high that I await them. Should not this hope of mine and this expectation doubly assure you of my whole-hearted obedience to the precepts of religion, a religion, I would add,

all the more admirable since it makes our eternal salvation and our future life not a matter of personal luck or of special privilege, but an absolute certainty that every man can acquire, provided he performs certain duties the Church bids us to perform and whose absolute efficacy it guarantees. It is these duties I am resolved to fulfill, your Grace, with all the power of my interest and in hope of what will be very sweet to me."

M. de Bréot listened with astonishment to the discourse of M. Herbou and wondered whether he jested or spoke seriously. It was impossible to read anything on M. Herbou's face. M. Herbou's face was large and well-modeled in glowing and healthy flesh, while his body was equally well-proportioned. Though he was about fifty years old he still remained robust. His whole appearance was in perfect harmony; no part being particularly remarkable or striking. His dress was exactly suited to his manners. M. Herbou was rich, but he allowed nothing in his clothes or his person to imply it. He derived no vanity from his wealth, but rather employed it to obtain every manner of luxury, especially all possible pleasure from his house, his food, and his women. He understood very well how to derive all possible pleasure from these luxuries.

Having learned by experience how bitter and painful is their absence he had done everything necessary never again to lack them. It was even whispered that he would have failed had he not submitted himself a score of times to the danger of hanging, from which punishment he saved himself so adroitly and with such good fortune that so far as the gallows were concerned he kept only the rope, which as everyone knows, brings good luck. Moreover, M. Herbou in a pleasant frame of mind could never find enough pests to fling at the Maréchal de Serpières and his booty wagons which attended him on his campaigns. He said that for a few thousand *ecus* it was not worth the trouble of openly assuming the role of pillager and knave. And he added scornfully that if he had amassed his wealth with as little care and scrupulousness he would have been richer than the King.

While M. de Bréot was studying his face, M. Herbou began laughing at the irritation of the Marquise.

"M. de Bréot, if you enjoy reading faces, observe rather that of Her Grace and you will see that she considers me exceeedingly ill-advised and presumptuous. My confidence in God appears hazardous to her and she considers me farther from paradise

than virtuous Monsieur Le Varlon de Verrigny whose penitence she admires, meanwhile saying to herself that I would do well to follow his footsteps, for she assumes that I am capable of even worse deeds than those of our unhappy sinner. It is in fact true that in matters female, to go no farther, I have been guilty of one or two peccadillos I am not proud of, but all the same they are not comparable to the one which has led the worthy Monsieur Le Varlon whither he now is and where there is no reason for me to be."

The Marquise's face showed that she did not wish to hear what was to follow.

"Monsieur Le Varlon de Verrigny," M. Herbou began slowly, "was wrong in using this little girl to satisfy so ugly a desire, which rose from that sensual fever to which men are commonly inclined. To have experienced similar desires oneself does not mitigate one's disgust when its crude and brutal effects are observed in others. But let us suppose that instead of this type of shameless rapture, Monsieur Le Varlon de Verrigny experienced toward Annette Courboin the passion we call love. In this case nothing would impress us as being more natural than that he should seek by violence or guile to encompass his ends. Love allows many privileges

and is its own excuse for deceit, for its peculiarity is that it renders indispensable to us the person who is its object. That is why it creates strange compulsions within us. Who would dream of taking offense at its implacable demands? Not only, as I have said, do guile and violence, but even the most flagrant rape and the most refined treachery become in a trice accepted by almost everyone, provided they be of use to love. Everyone is of this opinion for each one knows into what extremities of despair and suffering a refusal by the one he loves can plunge him. So intolerable is it that if someone told me he was devoured by one of those irremediable passions I would advise him not to quail before any crime, however heinous, rather than to endanger his heart to the remorse of not having kissed a mouth or touched a little territory of flesh. For such hideous denials can poison our lives and corrupt within us the well-springs of all happiness."

M. de Bréot, hearing M. Herbou speak thus, blushed again for thoughts of Mme. de Blionne rose to his mind. In his revery he would not have perhaps noticed that the Contractor was taking leave of the Marquise had M. Herbou not turned to him with these words:

"And you, Monsieur, come to my house tomorrow. I will tell you a story which proves the truth of my remarks and, as I can say it better than another, they are of gold."

And with these words M. Herbou disappeared, leaving M. de Bréot alone with the Marquise de Preignelay.

"Ah, Monsieur," said she after a moment's silence to M. de Bréot who was preparing to retire less in fear of being obtrusive than in a desire to allow his thoughts to follow a trail that was familiar to them and to which solitude was more in harmony than was company, "Ah, Monsieur, if you were what you ought to be and not what you are, how urgently would I warn you against so dangerous a society as that of M. Herbou! But you have made up your mind and it needs all the skill with which you play the lute to make these convictions of yours pardonable. If you were not a Libertine yourself I would beseech you to flee a hundred leagues from this one. For there are ways and reasons one may hold for believing in God which discourage and offend all other believers. And this Monsieur Herbou is one of those detestable men who disgust the truly religious by the ignominy of sharing a religion with him."

And the Marquise raised her eyes to heaven in an attitude of profound discouragement.

"Yes, Monsieur," she continued, "frankly Monsieur Herbou is an appalling man. You have just heard his conversation. What do you say to that insolence and ruthless passion to succeed, which makes him conceive heaven as the proper place for the continuance of his purpose and the pursuit of his designs until he has obtained in over-plus what he has not been able to realize here below? Does he not thereby misuse God's promises and grossly deflect divine purpose from its true path? But the worst is that this Monsieur Herbou is capable not only of all he says but of deserving heaven like any other man and indeed better than most. For Monsieur Herbou is in every respect a good Christian. He conforms rigorously to the precepts and rules of our religion. He attends mass at his parish church and receives the sacrament. He distributes a reasonable sum of money among the poor. He spares nothing to assure his salvation and he is rich enough to have others perform what is not altogether indispensable that he should perform himself. Ah, Monsieur, how many people there are within his power to interest in this matter! He lacks nothing, neither the help of the sacraments,

nor the exhortations of the clergy, nor the prayers of his associates. And he is a man who will reach heaven, while we will have great difficulty, I without the mercy and forgiveness of God and you without the special favor of his grace, which nothing, Monsieur, guarantees you. But Monsieur Herbou will have made so many preparations that all will transpire for him in the most pleasant manner and with everything provided for."

And the Marquise de Preignelay, now really angry, let M. de Bréot depart, with the latter fully determined not to ignore the invitation to call the very next day on M. Herbou the Contractor.

CHAPTER FIVE

HISTORY OF THE LOVE AFFAIRS, DEATH AND SINGULAR OBSEQUIES OF THE DUCHESS DE GRIGNY

I HAVE not always," said M. Herbou to M. de Bréot, "lived among people of quality, and I was ignored by them until all that was left of my former condition was a vague memory that it had not always been comparable to theirs. However, I do not intend to describe the methods I employed to rise from my obscurity, even though such a story might be of some use to a young man who has his way to make in this world. I will therefore not enlarge upon the various steps which led me from the low rank to which I was born to the position I hold today. Neither is it my intention to itemize the wealth I have acquired, nor to divulge the ways and means I acquired it. Such displays are the sign of a vulgar mind that takes gross pleasure in a vain parade of wealth whose value in money is less important than the use we make of it.

"You will agree I hope that the use I have made

of mine is not entirely unpraiseworthy, if you have noticed the objects that surround you. This house is not too disagreeable to look upon and I imagine that you will not condemn its furnishings, nor those of this room where we have just dined on food which was not over-badly prepared. I might now offer to show you my library; it contains some fairly good paintings, but we will content ourselves with the vista of the garden this window offers us. The grove of trees there show their first leaves and the fountains sparkle under a very round and most beautiful silvery moon."

M. Herbou paused for a moment while he arranged himself more comfortably in his spacious armchair.

"It is of a time already distant, Monsieur, that I wish to tell you; but please do not expect an attempt on my part to astonish you by contrasts, nor to achieve the effects of novels. I do not desire to heighten the glory of my present wealth by placing it against the background of my former misery, nor to describe the poverty of those earlier days with the purpose of more dramatically setting forth these gilded ones of the present, but solely for a better understanding of my story we must leave off discussing the times where we now are and

you must agree to follow me to those when I was born.

"Of this birth I will merely mention that an impetuosity which even then proved a strange faith in my destiny, brought me forth into the world far in advance of the time I was expected. My unseasonable advent was in fact so unheralded that my parents were caught without those swaddling clothes in which a newly born baby is usually wrapped. I was rolled up in a strip of old cloth and as it was winter and cold, they covered me with a piece of Genoese velvet that happened to be near at hand:—a most beautiful crimson piece of fabric and all embroidered with threads of gold. Alas! Monsieur, you must accept that less as a sign and prophecy of my future fortune than as the indication of the trade my father practiced, for the honest fellow was only a poor devil of a tapestry worker. He often completed at home the work he had been charged with and as he was very skillful at his trade, our wretched little room often had pieces of precious fabric lying about, similar to the one in which I was to warm my numb, little body.

"I will not abuse your indulgence by retailing other phases of my childhood. The one I have al-

ready described will be enough to prove that it was of the poorest and most lowly condition. Therefore I will spare you the little bright sayings of my infancy. They rewarded my parents for the bread they earned by the sweat of their brows and which they shared with me. But whatever it was, the food they gave me nourished me so well that I waxed large and strong, two qualities that have remained with me ever since. My development was quite ordinary. I went from swaddling clothes to trousers with all the usual little events of childhood. Like other children I learned the use of my hands, my legs, and my eyes. Finally I learned to express my thoughts. Mine were naïve, simple, and entirely in keeping with my age. Thus they became the ideas of a young scamp who soon promised to develop into a precocious rascal.

"In other words, Monsieur, I was seven or eight years old and had reached the point where traits of character begin to form. I revealed the outlines of my character perfectly. You must have met ragamuffins in the streets who closely resembled what I was then. They wear stockings full of holes, patched out shirts, and in these clothes consider themselves the best people in the world. Sometimes alone, sometimes in groups, they paddle in gutters,

fling stones at dogs, troop after coaches or sedans, annoy passersby, and flee only before a raised hand or a lifted cane. They are the true scourge of the cities which they harass with their games and badger with their quarrels. You can justly imagine me as one of them. I neglected nothing a boy is supposed to do during that age and I differed from my companions only because I already vaguely wondered what the future held in store for me. I must admit that these thoughts did not spring entirely from myself and that the plans and suggestions of my parents concerning me caused those which had the greatest power and consistency in my young mind.

"In fact they made no bones of talking about their troubles in front of me, and even less about what concerned my little person. It was thus I learned that my present carefree mode of life was very uncertain of continuing. On my return from my escapades I considered it natural to find a slice of fresh bread and a hot bowl of soup waiting for me. Consequently I was not a little disconcerted when I learned that one fine day I would have to earn this pittance in other ways than by pranks or games. The thought of any work whatsoever seemed unbearable.

"My father's trade and the small profit he earned by it did not attract me. The materials with which he worked were not unpleasant, for I loved the beautiful squares of cloth they gave him to embroider. I admired their strong and delicate threads, their arabesques and their flowers, their colors and their shadows. I admired the cords and tassels cleverly braided of many different or similar strands; I admired the fringes and twisted ropes of silk. My father employed them with a great deal of dexterity. He excelled in arranging them and bringing out their value. He wove tapestries for upholstered chairs; but I felt a certain scorn in seeing him work seated on a poor wooden stool with his tired hands hardened by toiling over these beautiful chairs, for it seemed more natural to lounge in them at one's ease, to feel their downy softness.

"I soon observed that most of the trades practiced by our neighbors procured them scarcely more money than my father earned by his, and that besides these there were others that were far more dangerous and arduous. During my long rambles through the city I was very observant. I knew all the trades over which the lower classes toiled and labored. I saw the slaters squatting on

the roofs of houses in the broiling sun earning a mere pittance by laying shingles. I saw masons perched on ladders laying bricks or blocks of rough stone. The hatchet of the carpenter, the saw of the stonecutter, the hammer of the blacksmith beating the iron on his anvil, made me stop up my ears, while the screech of the cabinetmakers' plane set my teeth on edge. I realized that all these trades were carried on only by the strength of one's arm or by breaking one's back, and I had no desire of attempting any of them. Through an air hole I also observed the baker's foreman sweating over his dough and the baker before his oven. My indolence and leisure had rendered me familiar with the smithy holding up the leg of a horse and singeing the hoof with a hot shoe. The buckets balanced across the shoulders of water-carriers weighed there too heavily; the teamster split his throat shouting to his horses or wore out his wrist snapping his whip. I realized meanwhile that certain modes of existence allow you to strut about in good clothes with your nose in the air, and that these modes of existence require no work. But my views on this point were quite hazy and I realized the time would come when I must exchange the street for the workshop, the store, or the stall.

"The indulgence and inconceivable goodness of my parents did not force me to come to a decision. I grew up, but my tears and my pleas, each time the question arose of putting an end to my indolence, impressed them, and I continued to live as before, but with this difference, that the ragged clothes I wore no longer seemed worthy of me. Although I had hardly taken care of mine, I continually begged for a better suit. My mother did all she could to please me and to make me neat. Skillful with needle and thread, she succeeded in dressing me decently. I was very proud of my new finery and you should have seen with what a haughty stare I considered the rags the beggars on the steps of the parish church wore. However, unlike them I had not the means of supporting myself by holding out a cup to receive alms, which after all is an industry and the equivalent of a trade. Would you believe it, Monsieur, but I became so vain that the sight of humble people did not fail to annoy me? Handsome gentlemen and beautiful women were more pleasing to my eyes, which were sharp and missed no detail of dress or face.

"It was during these days that I also began to notice the beauty of women. The glow of their cheeks, the freshness of their skin, or the grace of

their bodies, already enchanted me. Something indefinable spread through my blood when I saw them. I was thirteen years old and it would certainly have been better to have employed my time in other ways than by loafing or running about the streets, while my mother toiled at home and my father labored without rest. But this duty scarcely entered into my head and if it did insinuate its way there it did not remain for very long. The truth is that I stayed at home as little as possible, preferring to pass my time outdoors amusing myself as I chose to.

"There was, not far from the quarter where we lived, a large, abandoned enclosure. Grass grew there in profuse disorder beneath the branches of a number of ancient trees which had formerly shaded the garden. There even remained the ruins of a fountain, its water flowing out as it pleased. I often came to hide away in this deserted spot. The wall which enclosed it gaped open at certain places and I easily crawled into this retreat, certain of finding solitude and coolness there. I would sprawl on the grass and would sometimes sleep. No one ventured to disturb me. I considered the place my own and it seemed so suitable for the use I put it to that I could not imagine it being used for any-

thing else. I would have been very indignant had anyone come to trouble me there.

"Then one summer day, after I had roamed about the streets according to my custom and had consecrated a good part of the afternoon to the procession of coaches along the Cours, I went to my favorite place.

"The beauty of the horses, the gallantry of the costumes and the varied spectacle of so many people who, gathering there to display themselves, neglected nothing to make themselves appear to the best advantage, had led me to forget the piece of bread I kept in my pocket for lunch. Once arrived in the enclosure I drew forth my crust and fell upon it hungrily, washing it down with cool water from the fountain. I was so satisfied with my humble meal that as evening approached, I decided not to return home. Everything I had seen during the day plunged me into so pleasant a state of revery that I lay on my back to enjoy all of it offered to my imagination. The air was balmy and warm, while the star strewn sky glittered above the trees whose branches trembled slightly in a light breeze. I was thus listening to the rustle of the leaves when I noticed their sound was accompanied by music that gradually detached itself from the murmur of

leaves and soon completely filled my ears. How can I explain it, Monsieur? Listening to the music, I felt tears rise to my eyes. They rose with a strength and sweetness I could not restrain.

"I would have remained there the whole night through had not the sound of footsteps made me start. Someone was with me in the enclosure. I was terrified and I leaped to my feet just in time to prevent my body from tripping up the stranger facing whom I suddenly stood and whom my unexpected presence made recoil, as if it had startled him quite as much as his had frightened me. The intruder was a little fat man dressed in black and with a flute in his hand. My size reassured him and he at once inquired with a great deal of politeness what I was doing at that hour of the night in this abandoned place. As for him, he said he often came there to play his flute in the moonlight and to meditate upon his art in the silence. He could appreciate better there than elsewhere the justness of his tone.

"Having thus spoken, he without further ceremony sat down upon the grass and began trilling his flute. Its music was even more lovely when it was close at hand. Again I felt tears rise to my eyes. He noticed my sighs and breaking off his play-

ing asked me the reason for them. I told him they were caused by nothing else than by his flute. My reply evidently pleasing him, he asked me many questions; after which he wished to know my name, my age, my family, and if I would care to learn to play tunes as he did. He added that he happened at the moment to need an apprentice; that he was a member of a small group of musicians who gave concerts when engaged to do so; that if I proved to have talent he would do his best to turn it to account; and that I would soon be in a position to render him service. He concluded by announcing that he was called Master Jean Pucelard and that he lived at the Trois Degrés. And it was thus, Monsieur, that I went forth from the enclosure with Master Pucelard, who handed me his flute to carry and which I carried, you may well believe, as if it were made of gold.

"This Pucelard was an excellent little man. With his flute in his fingers he became the most serious person in the world and with lowered eyes played it extremely gravely. But once the instrument was in its case he quickly showed himself to be merry, jocular and light-hearted. Every morning I attended my lessons with unbelievable ardor. Since the very first ones Master Pucelard professed to be

pleased with me. He promised that if I persevered I might succeed, not in equalling him, but in bringing not too much shame upon a teacher such as he. The truth is that my progress was rapid and that at the end of a very short time I could read the notes and recognize the keys. I was able to execute my part properly in the little troop of musicians Master Pucelard led with him to people's houses, there to entertain them at their dinners with various airs or to play tunes for dancing for those who enjoyed that diversion.

"This early success was not sufficient for my zeal. I ceaselessly tried to become perfect in my profession. These efforts won the admiration of my father and mother. They never wearied of hearing me play. My mother clasped her hands, thanking God for blessing her with such a son, while my father nodded his head with pleasure, pausing a moment over a piece of tapestry. It was even better when I brought home some money. Master Pucelard gave it to me when I satisfied him which frequently happened. My parents took to praising themselves loudly for not having forced me into any of those trades toward which I had shown so little taste, since I had all by myself chosen one that was as honorable as it was lucrative. In the quarter people

ceased to point me out as a sluggard and good-for-nothing and I became a sort of prodigy in the eyes of the neighbors. I was proud of my new position and I already took on such airs that when I passed our parish church with my flute under my arm I did not fail to drop a few pennies into the cups of the beggars squatting on the steps. Moreover, I knew them by name and they called to me from afar by mine, better to attract my pence, for those folk know very well that there is pleasure in being distinguished from the mob and that the name one bears seems to gain virtue in our ears by being repeated by others and from passing from mouth to mouth, even though they be hungry mouths, rather than the deep throated voice of Fame.

"Meanwhile Monsieur Pucelard continued to give me lessons. One by one he taught me all the secrets of his art. One evening we had planned to practice in the enclosure I have mentioned. We looked forward with a great deal of pleasure to alternately answering each other with our flutes beneath the moon, but when we reached the place what was our surprise to find it completely desolate. A great number of trees had been felled and part of the ground was cut by trenches. Our retreat had been

intruded upon and destroyed, and we were obliged to return home very greatly disappointed.

"The next day our first concern was to inquire into the causes of this change. My question aroused much laughter and everyone was greatly astonished that I was unaware the Duke de Grigny who owned the place had got it into his head to build there. Once the work had begun my Lord Duke had ordered that it be accomplished with the greatest dispatch. This ignorance of mine will prove better than words to what a degree my musical studies dominated my interests, and how my ear was more attentive to the sounds of my flute than to rumors of what was happening.

"It might seem to you, Monsieur, that the news of this work would have been indifferent to me and would contain nothing to interest me for more than a moment. However, this was not so. It often returned to my thoughts and hardly a day passed that I did not wander near the place. Sometimes it would be along my way, at other times I would turn from my route, attracted by a curiosity I did not attempt to explain and which made me linger for hours to watch the laborers. The speed with which they worked astonished me. My Lord Duke must have been a very powerful noble whom

it was wise to please, for the masons and carpenters spared no pains. Indeed the building rose, so to speak, under one's very eyes. The mansion of the Duke de Grigny promised to be very beautiful and worthy in every respect of so illustrious a person. The Duke often appeared there himself to make certain that everything conformed exactly to his plans. It was thus that I saw him one day descending from his coach. He was a man of middle age, highly colored and vigorous. He was not afraid to straddle girders or to leap over piles of plaster, and he took note of everything. From a distance I heard him shouting to the workers and not before he entered his coach could I decide to return home.

"I did not cease to be content with my good fortune and to follow my teacher, Monsieur Pucelard, whither he pleased to lead me. That year we were summoned to many banquets to regale the guests with our music. Our little troup skilfully rendered the airs Master Pucelard selected, and he selected them with perfect taste or composed them with admirable talent. He knew how to choose those appropriate to the food that was being served. He had some for soup, some for the entrée, some for the roast, and others for dessert, all of them being in perfect harmony with the food. The tunes which

accompanied dessert were particularly successful and it must have been a real pleasure to munch some morsel of fine pastry or to nibble a savory tart in time to our melodies. I executed my part with great attention, refusing to permit the laughter of the guests or the clatter of glassware and dishes to distract me. Sometimes, however, I faltered and my notes became less certain if some woman's face turned toward me or if two ladies with their eyes upon me, whispered in each other's ear. I often saw pretty faces that wine had rendered bold. They examined me with indulgence, for at fifteen my cheeks were ruddy, but a scowl from Monsieur Pucelard brought me back to the task of trilling my flute well and of not missing my notes even though I was being stared at.

"The concert over, Master Pucelard was very good-natured and was, as I have mentioned, very light hearted. He often urged me to amuse myself and, convinced that music inclined one toward love, he was astonished to see me so proper. This reserve of mine even led him to think less of me than he had at first been evidently inclined. He had believed I possessed more fire. Moreover he suggested that it would be wise for me to remain as I was and not to risk the composition of music, for that

required a mental ferment and the inventive spark which he very much feared I lacked.

"I meditated upon these remarks one evening as I was returning to my room. I was very fond of strolling through the silence of dark and deserted streets and it was rare that I crawled into bed without first having halted before the mansion of the Duke de Grigny. It had been completed some weeks before, but was as yet unoccupied. I admired its lofty black facade. The evening before I had remained for some time studying the columns of the gateway. It opened onto a little square so that one could take a few steps back to better judge its architecture. I had been entranced by the beautiful shadows cast upon the pavement by a moon waning above the roof. But on the night I mention the sky was overcast and it was so dark that as I walked along I longed for the moon of yesterday. I was thus proceeding with my head lowered when at a turn in the lane an unexpected sight caused me to raise my eyes.

"The windows of Grigny Mansion were all illuminated and the square was bright with the torches held aloft by lackeys who escorted a golden coach. The horses were about to enter the gate when some strange thing seemed to frighten them

and they suddenly stopped. The mighty beasts, rearing on their hind legs, seemed terrified. They refused to move on. The lackeys waved their flaring torches whose glare increased the terror of the beasts, when suddenly the coach door flew open and out leaped a person whom I at once recognized as the Duke de Grigny. He turned to give his hand to a lady and to help her out of the dangerous coach. She wore a long cape and a velvet mask which she lifted from her eyes as soon as she felt her high heels touch the ground. She performed these movements with the greatest ease and grace and then glanced around her.

"Ah! Monsieur, imagine a face rosy and almost childlike, of a most fascinating oval, a charming mouth of the deepest crimson, hair of the finest gold. She was dressed in a gown of silvery silk, all embroidered with flowers and branches of leaves, and she held a great red rose that seemed to bleed in the torchlight. Meanwhile the Duke de Grigny had again offered her his hand and, abandoning the coach whose horses still struggled furiously, he turned toward the gate which he designated with a gesture as if welcoming his wife there. Entering it they disappeared from sight.

"I remained rooted to the spot, stupefied, over-

whelmed. When I recovered myself the square was empty. The coach was no longer there. Only two torches remained, guttering in the iron rings they had been thrust through at each side of the closed door. I took a few steps forward. The rose the Duchess held in her hand had lost a few of its red petals, which seemed to stain the bare and silent paving with bright spots of blood."

* * *

M. Herbou paused a moment. His large face seemed lighted by the gleam of these old torches and by the burning memory of this past. He sighed deeply like someone who has lost breath from having sped long and without pause into the far reaches of the past. He continued with these words:

"It is a strange story, Monsieur, this of the marriage of the Duke de Grigny with Mademoiselle de Barandin. She was still very young when at first sight she so attracted my Lord Duke that he announced he was hopelessly in love with her. He himself was neither old nor ill-favored and he was, moreover, tremendously wealthy. When he avowed to the parents of Mademoiselle de Barandin his intention of marrying her they were blinded by the dazzling compliment. What was their surprise, however, when upon announcing this event to their

daughter they saw her become deathly pale and swoon away. At first they considered this fainting fit to be nothing more than a sign of excessive joy, but they were soon disillusioned when the young lady confessed to them that she secretly loved a young gentleman of their acquaintance whose name was Monsieur de Cérac and that they had already plighted their troth. This Monsieur de Cérac owned lands adjoining those of Monsieur de Barandin, neither of the two estates being at all extensive. Monsieur de Barandin owned an old, half-ruined chateau contiguous to one in scarcely better repair which was inhabited by the family of Monsieur de Cérac. Some years previously Monsieur de Barandin had moved away from this chateau, which was hardly suitable for anything else than for burying oneself in oblivion, and had gone to make his way at Court. It was there that his daughter rediscovered young Monsieur de Cérac with whom she had played when both were children and who was also attempting to make his fortune at Paris. Though he had not discovered the capricious Goddess, he found another divinity under the guise of Mademoiselle de Barandin.

"Mademoiselle de Barandin had not dared to inform her parents of her affection for the young

man, because of his low estate. The two lovers awaited some favorable opportunity. The request of the Duke de Grigny left them no choice.

"There was little chance that the parents of Mademoiselle de Barandin would sacrifice his Lord Duke for Monsieur de Cérac, but their daughter by force of tears and pleadings succeeded in gaining their promise that they would inform the Duke of the condition of her heart, a promise Monsieur and Madame de Barandin were at no small trouble to grant. But Mademoiselle de Barandin was certain that the information would cool the Duke's affection for her, as he would realize his love could not be returned by someone who avowed so frankly and so insistently that she loved someone else. My Lord Duke heard the avowal without sign of emotion and sent word to Mademoiselle de Barandin that he would in no way relinquish her and that he would do all that was necessary to prove his determination to marry. Indeed, he soon proved it in his own blunt way. A short while thereafter, having accosted Monsieur de Cérac at tennis, he picked a quarrel with him and both betook themselves to the field of honor. The duel occurred in that abandoned enclosure which belonged to the Duke. The struggle was fierce on both sides and

the adversaries displayed uncommon spirit and courage. The Duke de Grigny was badly wounded and Monsieur de Cérac killed.

"Under the circumstances the conduct of Mademoiselle de Barandin was passing strange. Displaying no sign of emotion other than extreme pallor, she listened to the account of Monsieur de Cérac's death and only asked if the duel had conformed strictly to rules. She was assured that everything had taken place according to the best usage. To this reply she maintained silence for some time and then announced with the greatest calm, that the will of God having been made manifest in respect to Monsieur de Cérac, she would not oppose what this same will revealed in respect to the Duke de Grigny and she would marry him whensoever it was desired.

"This decision caused much surprise among those who were cognizant of this affair. It was laid to the capriciousness of woman's heart. The more reasonable thought that if Mademoiselle de Barandin was not as she appeared to be, devoid of all feeling toward Monsieur de Cérac's death, she was affected by what the Duke de Grigny had risked his life for. She thus proved, said they, that she loved love even more than lovers and that she was more faithful to

her evident longing to be loved than to the fate of a lover. There were also those who declared that Mademoiselle de Barandin only displayed common sense and that she did openly what others wishing to render it less shocking, would have done by subterfuge, that it was necessary to give her credit for this frankness and that, moreover, she had proved to Monsieur de Cérac she possessed great sensibility in preferring him poor as he was, to the Duke de Grigny, and finally that during his life he had received a beautiful sign of her love, for which being dead, he had no reason and no cause to reproach her.

"The Duke de Grigny was elated to learn of Mademoiselle de Barandin's attitude toward him. He cursed his wound which kept him from flying to the knees of his lady. For not one moment did he dream that in the depths of her heart she might harbor some resentment for the death of Monsieur de Cérac. Was he not there himself to replace Monsieur de Cérac in her affections? Furthermore his Grace was so convinced of the magnitude of his virtues and of the nobleness of his high birth that he did not doubt the honor of being preferred by him would lead Mademoiselle de Barandin to forget the little unpleasantness she owed him. The

good fortune of marrying a Duke was well worth being forced even by violence to renounce a humble career as wife of a country squire. And it was therefore that Mademoiselle de Barandin at the altar received the wedding ring from that same hand which had so lightly dispatched the young Monsieur de Cérac.

"Although this wedding had been preceded by the event I have just described and which rendered it unusual enough, the Duke de Grigny had little cause to regret his choice. He had, moreover, every reason to be content with his wife, first because she was beautiful and secondly because she proved herself to be the most perfect of mates.

"She needs must be one, for my Lord Duke who, in spite of all his wealth had until his marriage not passed as generous, suddenly swerved from his customary stinginess. Not only did he refuse her nothing she might need to adorn herself, but he was the first to urge her to conceal nothing she might desire to make herself the most exquisite lady in the land. He applauded every expenditure she could devise and showered her with the rarest and most costly gifts. Nothing was too expensive, neither the most gorgeous gowns, nor the most brilliant jewels. It is true that she enhanced their value by the

charm of her face and body. This elegance added to her loveliness and she had a manner of setting off what she wore that was hers and hers alone. The late Monsieur de Cérac could not have recognized in this *grande dame* of sumptuous array the simple young lady whose hand he had disputed with the Duke de Grigny.

"Whether through his wife's desire or his love for her, the Duke de Grigny a short while after his marriage announced that his house near the Arsenal was too cramped and that he intended building a larger and more spacious one. It was soon announced that he had decided to build an edifice that was worthy in every respect of the triumphant person who filled his home with so much brilliance and happiness. A site for this new mansion was easily selected. The Duke de Grigny owned extensive grounds that were exactly suited to his purpose; those same grounds, in fact, where he had killed the poor Monsieur de Cérac. The Duke's project was rapidly put into execution and it was thus, as I have told you, that I saw him one evening descending from his coach with the Duchess, and under the torchlights entering their new mansion for the first time."

* * *

M. de Bréot began to be deeply interested in M. Herbou's story.

"From that evening, Monsieur, Grigny Mansion became, if I may speak of it thus, the hub of my life and the abode of all my thoughts. The streets I followed blindly led me there. I could not glance at the door without a beating heart. Not more than a day passed that I did not go there to stare at it. No longer was I led there as of old by a vague curiosity, but I was driven there by an irresistible force. Sometimes when I was practicing at my flute in my little room, my breath would suddenly desert me and my fingers would become numb. At these moments a demon possessed me. I would leave the melody broken and without halting I would fly to Grigny Mansion. Often the same madness took possession of me when I was accompanying Master Pucelard and all the respect I owed my teacher was necessary to keep me from abandoning him and flying there. This morbid preoccupation which enthralled my mind shortly halted the progress I was making in my art. Monsieur Pucelard deplored my negligence without understanding its cause. He often spoke bitterly of those false inclinations to learn that one discovers in young people and which give only a vain hope all too prompt in vanishing.

But as he was very polite he expressed only in a roundabout way something whose meaning I very well understood and to which I did not reply.

"To stare at Grigny Mansion was enough to dissipate all my shame and to disperse my repentance. It seemed an extraordinary place to me. I experienced a sort of envy toward those people whom I saw entering it and whom I saw depart. Both seemed endowed with an invisible virtue that raised them above other mortals. The number of these privileged beings was considerable, for the Duke and Duchess were attended by a large body of servants and entertained lavishly. Long lines of coaches waited before their door, which superbly dressed ladies and gentlemen entered. But I must admit that it was less to watch them that I stationed myself before Grigny Mansion than in the hope of something else whose very thought was enough to throw me into extreme agitation.

"The Duchess de Grigny often left her house to return calls. Sometimes she went alone, sometimes she was accompanied by her husband. She seemed to flood her coach with the splendor and radiance of her beauty. Ah! Monsieur, twenty miracles saved me from being knocked down by the horses or crushed under the wheels of the coach, so incapable

of avoiding them did my wonder and astonishment render me. I would stand motionless, my eyes fixed upon her lovely face and for long after it had disappeared I would remain there as if blinded with ecstasy. I came to know every detail of her features. I knew the exact color of her mouth, the texture of her skin, and each time this delicious sight would enchant me more.

"Meanwhile I led a life that was both restless and monotonous. I distinguished one day from another only by the fact that I had seen the Duchess de Grigny or had been deprived of this happiness. The remaining hours formed a confused interim when I moved mechanically without thought. Such a condition might have continued indefinitely. For a whole winter I stood before her house and nothing discouraged me in this strange madness, neither mud, nor ice, nor snow. It required all the ruggedness of my constitution to preserve my life during the long hours of watching and waiting when I froze to the marrow of my bones, for nothing could swerve me from my purpose.

"Meanwhile I noted that for some weeks the Duchess de Grigny most often left in her coach alone. Though her loveliness was unchanged there was an impalpable air of something different. Her

manner was no longer that of timidity and modesty which had made her so charming. For now she raised her eyes and glanced about her with a certain boldness and arrogance. I did not try to understand this change and I was content simply to admire its novelty, when quite by chance I learned the reason for it and in a way that makes it worth describing.

"Monsieur Pucelard, my teacher, was one day summoned to the house of Monsieur des Bertonnières, who was entertaining a few friends and who wished to enliven the dinner with music. Master Pucelard informed me that he would have need of my services and recommended that I avoid that day-dreaming which had become a habit with me and which displeased him. I promised him that I would be all attention and would execute my part more reliably than usual. All went well and as we did our best everyone seemed quite satisfied with me. While we were resting over our instruments a moment and while I attempted to avoid falling into a revery, I listened to what was being said at the table. One of the guests mentioned the name of the Duchess de Grigny. Instantly the conversation became general. I was all ears and missed not a word, for the gentlemen spoke in loud voices. The Duchess de Grigny it seemed had wandered far

from those early days of her marriage when she had proved herself to be the most perfect of wives. The laughter that greeted these remarks proved, if not their truth, at least that no one present was sufficiently outraged to denounce them. The report must have been common knowledge for anyone to have dared advance it so freely.

"The Duchess de Grigny's dissolute life was then so public that one could openly converse about it! The Duke himself ignored it and displayed no sign of jealousy. On the contrary he had a little while before accepted a new commission from Court that often kept him from home. And this confidence displayed by the Duke redoubled the laughter of the gentlemen.

"Yes, Monsieur, it was indeed this news that I unexpectedly overheard. The Duchess de Grigny was having affairs with whoever wished them. I felt as if suffocated. A blush of shame and anger suffused my cheeks at the slander, for it was the name itself that drove home what I had just heard. So monstrous and criminal an outrage did it seem that I longed to slay those who had committed it. I was on the point of hurling myself at the throats of these liars. But what a fine business would it have been, Monsieur, for a little musician like me

to attack these gentlemen and leap at their faces! Think what a grotesque figure this new defender of reputations and this new champion of virtue would have made. However, I did nothing, Monsieur, for it is only too true that the world soon accustoms us to not doing what we wish to do. In place of standing forth as Virtue's Avenger I remained the same docile apprentice of Monsieur Pucelard who at a sign from his master, took up his flute to draw pure notes from it, but who still panted with emotion and whose heart pounded with such violence that he could feel it beneath his suit.

"That evening, Monsieur, left me in a strange mood. I carried away a lively horror of man's wickedness and those who had thus abused a person who seemed to me a sort of divinity appeared worse than anything I had ever been able to imagine. Indeed their vain remarks had failed to destroy within my heart the image I cherished of the Duchess de Grigny. Was it not enough to see her passing in her coach to be assured of her virtue? Even her arrogance merely expressed the loftiness of her scorn for those accusations whose villainy she doubtless knew. Thus everything contributed to maintain the respect and adoration I consecrated

to the lady and meanwhile, Monsieur, I will describe a certain change that took place in my ideas.

"Among those thoughts which I enjoyed the most concerning the Duchess and which were all those of admiration and respect, there entered others that were not reassuring and which troubled me. They were sudden and involuntary, and I was the less able to put them out of mind when they assumed the form of vivid and seductive dreams. I had often observed the body and dress of the Duchess and though this sight had delighted my eyes it had at no time led them to imagine more than they could see. This was no longer true after the insolent remarks I had overheard. Without knowing it they affected my heart. In spite of myself I little by little began imagining that these fine clothes concealed a body similar to that of all women. At first the idea arose obscure and fugitive and I heeded it only long enough to thrust it down, but it returned so frequently that I did not delay in making myself familiar with what was most insolent and lewd about it. I avoided my dreams no longer as I should have done. On the contrary I even returned to them, applying myself to them minutely. Once there, I went further. Yes, this beautiful lady had a body like all women, and this

body served not only to support the clothes that covered it, but it served her in practices whose pleasures I only knew by hearsay. I was certain there were men to whom the Duchess granted liberties whose slightest favors seemed to me prodigious. She offered her mouth to kisses. Men kissed her shoulders and her throat. She suffered their kisses and even responded. Though I was not unaware that this was how one conducts oneself with women the idea overwhelmed me to an extent that I know not how to describe. But what you can readily imagine is that these thoughts warmed my young blood, though they at the same time outraged my sense of delicacy. For as often as I abandoned myself to their delights, so also did I reproach myself with their horror. I despised myself for having for one instant succumbed to the evil voice of slander. All that was rumored concerning the Duchess, was it not false and vile? And she of whom I had dreamed a moment before with unbelievable intimacy at once regained her sanctity and again appeared to me as she should never have ceased to appear—one of the most virtuous ladies of the realm.

"Meanwhile, Monsieur, in spite of all reason, my agitation redoubled. I slept badly and I lost all

appetite for food. I passed each moment I could steal from my trade to wander near Grigny Mansion. Day did not suffice me and I sacrificed a good part of the night in this occupation. I spied upon the dark or lighted windows; I lay in wait for those who came or went. I must admit that I observed nothing untoward, nor anything that could confirm what was openly repeated among the people that the Duchess de Grigny received lovers and that they were numerous and varied. These stories tormented me. I wished to pierce the thick walls of the house with my own eyes. I dreamed of introducing myself within it on any pretext I could invent. This project was one of my dearest fancies. I invented a thousand and one strategies of which not one was possible. I lived in a ceaseless fever of imaginings.

"Blind as I was I must have noted that my folly would eventually estrange Master Pucelard, for his attitude toward me was already feeling its effects. Since the evening we had first met in the moonlit enclosure where Grigny Mansion now stood, he had lavished the liveliest and most constant interest upon me, and I owed him much. It was he who had placed a flute between my fingers and taught me how to use it. When I had learned to perform upon

it properly he had received me into his little orchestra and thereby even had supplied me with means to earn my living. But at present there was no doubt that Master Pucelard had less frequent need of my talents. Nothing was more natural than that I had exhausted his patience and that he was vexed at my incessant negligence, which made me forget the little skill I had acquired. Doubtless he was not eager to expose his troup to the dissonance of which I was occasionally the author. In fact, it too often happened that I would miss my cues or produce false notes which broke discordantly into the harmony. More than once when we separated after our concert Monsieur Pucelard would not arrange to have me present at the next one. He even seemed to keep his plans secret from me, though he explained to the other musicians where they were to meet. They spoke together in whispers and kept me at a distance.

"I was not greatly affected by these little mysteries. Indifferent to everything that did not pertain to Grigny Mansion I was not troubled by my enforced leisure. I profited by it to wander near the mansion. Sight of the Duchess troubled me more and more. Upon seeing her coach my knees shook and my forehead would become bathed in sweat.

Often I was forced to return home and lie down to regain my composure.

"I was one day stretched out on the bed occupied with my reflections, when someone knocked at the door. Master Pucelard entered. I had not seen him during the whole week. Evidently worried, he took a chair and told me that he had had no need of me, but that this evening if I cared to join him and Jean Sequin, the three of us would play at a certain house to which he would lead me and where he sometimes went with Sequin and Van Culp. Sequin and Van Culp were the usual assistants of Master Pucelard; Sequin playing the violin and Van Culp the lute. The latter being sick had been obliged to remain at home for a few days. Monsieur Pucelard had then thought of me.

"When I accepted this offer, Master Pucelard lowered his voice. He admitted that he had hesitated before asking me because I seemed a bit too young, but after all a boy of fifteen should be capable of discretion. He then had me promise under oath to tell no one where we had gone, adding that it was to our interest to keep it secret. I swore silence. He told me, moreover, that I would be well paid, and left asking me to arrive at the meeting place on time and to dress neatly.

"I appeared at the time and place Monsieur Pucelard had indicated and a little later observed him approaching with Sequin. Their air of mystery puzzled me. They made a sign for me to follow. Night had already descended. Without observing the streets we passed, I let my mind wander in its usual revery, when after a number of turns Master Pucelard suddenly halted before a door built into a high wall, above which towered the trees of a garden I recognized immediately as being that of Grigny Mansion. At once my whole body began trembling. Master Pucelard stealthily slipped a key into the lock, warning us at the same time to make no sound and to move cautiously.

"Thus we passed a row of trees and proceeded along a covered path between rows of boxwood. At the end of the path a fountain splashed in a circular opening where a number of paths converged. The water of the basin overflowed into a pool. In the distance lay the somber and slumbering mass of Grigny Mansion. We approached it. Master Pucelard knocked at a little door and we entered a dark corridor. We descended a few steps. Master Pucelard pushed me along before him.

"We found ourselves in a brilliantly lighted room with a table set and loaded with food and wines.

Two chairs had been placed opposite each other. Master Pucelard having arranged our chairs, seated himself against the wall. We waited. My heart pounded. Ah! Monsieur, how wildly it beat, as if it might burst my breast when I beheld the Duchess de Grigny herself enter the room. She was in her gaiest dress, with her beautiful golden hair and her throat uncovered. Behind her walked Count des Bertonnières. What was he doing at this hour in the house of the Duchess? What were we doing there? What was the significance of this clandestine meal? Meanwhile the two took their places at table. Sequin tuned his violin. Master Pucelard raised his flute to his lips and I mine, but I well believed that no breath would issue from my mouth. I was not, however, at the end of my astonishment.

"Try to imagine what my state of mind was. The Duchess from the beginning of the meal had begun laughing loudly. She frequently raised her glass to her lips and with her own hand filled the glass of Count des Bertonnières. He was young and well-built, but I could not overcome my astonishment at his manners and his conversation. The Duchess responded to his equivocations or even to his ribaldry by leaning back in her chair laughing, her face animated with wine. Instead of resenting

certain gestures and familiarities she only redoubled her gaiety. Both appeared to have forgotten that we were present. Master Pucelard continued in the most natural manner in the world to trill his flute and I imitated him without knowing too well how I did, for my eyes were riveted to the spectacle before me.

"Count des Bertonnières was soon completely drunk. He raised a terrible uproar, breaking plates and glasses, singing and shouting at the top of his lungs. The laughter of the Duchess at moments dominated the tumult of this mad revel. Half-naked, her hair undone, she spurred him on. Her face, flushed not with shame but with a lewd fire, seemed that of a Bacchante. The fever of the orgy glowed in her cheeks. Ah! Monsieur, how beautiful she was thus all shameless with wine, all animal with lust!

"Master Pucelard had ceased to play. Wine gurgled from the mouth of a bottle. I heard my teeth chattering and I leaned against the wall to keep from falling.

"It seemed to me that the ceiling was about to sag down and crush me. A noise roared in my head which became a sharp, repeated sound. I glanced toward the Duchess. In proportion as her eyes grew

larger their expression became one of vengeance, of hatred, and of fierce joy. I felt as if stabbed by these eyes that no longer saw me, but passed through me and beyond, toward someone whose presence, as I suddenly turned, made me spring to a corner of the room. At the same moment the Count des Bertonnières, rising unsteadily to his feet, smashed open a window and leaped to the garden below.

"On the threshold of the door which he had just burst open, stood the Duke de Grigny. He stood in the full light. I recognized him by his black wig, his blue *cordon* and his brown suit rather than by his face, for a strange pallor had transformed it into a mask of wax. Booted and spurred, he gripped a hunting whip in his fist. Who could have informed him? I thought later on of Van Culp's illness, but for the moment I was overcome by amazement and by the horror of what followed.

"The Duke took a step forward. His wife took a step likewise. She laughed no more. She pulled up her stocking that had fallen over the heel of her shoe. Her naked, white breast slipped from its unclasped bodice. The Duke and she stared at each other. Swiftly bending down she dipped her fingers

into a little pool of wine that stained the floor, and she filliped a few drops of it into her husband's face. He wiped them away with the back of his sleeve. But as she did this I heard her utter these words whose meaning I only understood later.

" 'Cérac, thou art avenged!'

"The snarling lash of the whip cut off her words. The braided thong stung her white shoulders and left a red welt there. The whip snarled a second time. The Duchess stood stock still as if she had been changed into a statue. Blow followed blow and not one failed to reach its mark. The Duke lashed at her with all his might. The thong tore the fabric of her dress and rent her flesh. The Duke stepped back a pace and gripped the haft in his two fists. The Duchess at this blow uttered a terrible cry and fell face downward on the floor.

"There she shrieked with all the overwhelming anguish of her pain. The Duke completed his frightful work. He ripped free what remained of her torn dress and placed his boot upon her gory body. He did not cease to strike. His great wig bobbed at his neck. The Duchess cried no more. With his boot the Duke roughly turned this inert and bloody nakedness over, then bending down he knotted the twisted braid of golden hair about his

fist and dragged this crimson corpse behind him. I saw him disappear through the little door that he had entered.

"Struck dumb with terror and revulsion I had watched this scene from the corner where I had hidden. A breath of air coming in through the open window revived me and dried the sweat from my forehead. Master Pucelard was no longer in the room. I was alone. I listened. There was no sound. The corridor was dark. Better to find my way I took one of the still-burning tapers and passing along the corridor, reached the door we had entered. Outside the night was dark. Huge black clouds pursued each other across the sky. I ran along the path between the rows of boxwood until I reached the fountain. Water still splashed from its basin to the pool below. I seated myself near it and began to weep. Then I left the garden and returned home. I fell into a violent fever. When I recovered I was told that Master Pucelard had fled the city. Sequin and Van Culp had also fled. I held my flute in aversion, and I returned to vagabondage and wandering about the streets as of old. My parents considered it the effect of my illness and believed my mind was slightly deranged."

* * *

M. Herbou remained silent for a short while. M. de Bréot, respecting his silence, waited till M. Herbou thought proper to take up his story again.

"The Duke de Grigny," continued M. Herbou, "displayed a semblance of grief at the death of his wife, which occurred about four months after the affair I have just described.

"During these four months he continued to leave his home as usual and to return quite openly in his coach. The Duchess, however, did not accompany him, as she had often done before, but remained in her room. To those who asked why she was no longer seen, he replied simply that the doctors had confined her to her room because of a cold, which had so affected her throat that she was incapable of making herself understood by any one.

"Her father and mother presenting themselves at Grigny Mansion were not permitted to see their daughter; but the following day they received a letter from her which confirmed her indisposition. She also announced therein that she had profited by her solitude to devote a little time to her soul. These honest people were fully reassured and without examining the handwriting too closely, which might have revealed a slight difference from that of the Duchess de Grigny, they rejoiced at her dis-

position for rumors concerning her had reached their ears. Without believing any more than was necessary, they were not sorry for the lie which this penitence gave to the shameless slander that had been circulated about her. The Duke de Grigny referred with equal readiness and pleasure to his wife's sudden taste for solitude. He even jested about it upon occasion, but with that slight suggestion of respect one owes to someone who takes advantage of physical suffering to heal his soul.

"The truth is that if the Duchess had withdrawn from the eyes of society she did not even appear to those of her servants. No one except the Duke de Grigny entered her room, for he carried the key with him in his pocket. Servants no longer helped her to dress and it was said that she even made her own bed as an act of penitence. The Duke seemed to accept his wife's new mode of life with good-natured tolerance. It was observed that he felt the good effects of it upon his own soul, for the outbursts of wrath and brutality he had formerly not abstained from, now vanished, and he became the mildest and most patient of men. This change was soon noticed by those who had been forced to suffer from his rage. They were indeed happy to be spared them and as they credited his wife with some part

of his reformation they therefore were grateful to her. Moreover it came to be generally believed that those tales hawked about by evil tongues had been too quickly accepted and that one should deduct a great deal from their truth. Nothing is more uncertain than public judgment on reputations and what had caused that of the Duchess to be at one time decried, now in as short a time caused it to rise to a point where nothing more could be desired. It was in the midst of this return to favor that news suddenly was circulated that the Duchess de Grigny had been found dead in her bed. Physicians summoned in haste were only able to announce that she had ceased to live, without being able to explain how she had come to so deplorable and untimely an end. Sorrow for her death was universal and no one doubted the fact that the Duke de Grigny was inconsolable.

"The body of the Duchess when it was embalmed, appeared in perfect condition. The only thing of a suspicious nature found upon it was a few wounds, still unhealed. The Duke amid tears admitted that these marks were caused by various disciplines the Duchess had practiced to mortify her flesh. People who learned of this detail interpreted the zeal of the Duchess for self-mortifica-

tion as a sign that she had doubtless received some warning of her impending death, and that this was also the reason for her sudden and complete retirement. The Duke de Grigny was of the same opinion. He added that he had often remonstrated with his wife to moderate the severity of her macerations, but she would listen to none of his pleas, so exalted was she in her religious frenzy. As proof thereof he offered the bizarre will discovered among her papers. In this will she ordered that her body be taken to the estate her parents owned in the province and where she had been born. She prescribed that it be borne there without pomp or ceremony and attended only by seven paupers chosen from the parish, who were to follow her corpse to bear witness that it was not that of a *grande dame* of her times, but that of a humble sinner before God."

M. Herbou sighed.

"What was most appalling in the death of the Duchess de Grigny was less what I have described than what remains for me to tell, namely, by what diabolic invention the Duke executed the last desire of his wife and how he transformed this supreme wish into a monstrous comedy. Hate should disappear with the lives of those whom we hate, but

the Duke de Grigny pursued to her very grave she whom he would not forgive for having in her own way avenged the death of her adored lover. He needs must glut his malice as he had glutted his wrath and his violence. To the lash of the whip which had torn her guilty flesh and to the poison which had secretly accomplished his deed, he added something, Monsieur, that I must now tell you, even though I will have great difficulty in describing all its derisive and baroque horror."

* * *

M. de Bréot's attention was redoubled when M. Herbou continued.

"His Grace falsely represented the wish of his dead wife in regard to her interment and announced he was resolved to conform strictly to the desire she had expressed. At first it was believed that sorrow had affected the mind of this tender husband and that his resolution was merely one of those fancies produced by the first onslaughts of sorrow; a resolution which calmer deliberation would prevent him from accomplishing. But he held to it and all were soon convinced that the Duke fully intended to put his plans into execution. In vain did the parents of the Duchess try to oppose him. They pointed out the indecency of such a proce-

dure, the cruelty of allowing these dear remains to jolt along the roads in so miserable a company. As they were obstinate in their attempts to convince him, the Duke de Grigny shut their mouths by commanding that seven beggars be at once selected from the parish, and that they be advised to keep themselves ready to do what was expected of them. And with these words he turned his back on Monsieur and Madame de Barandin.

"These simple people decided it was scarcely worth the trouble of having had a Duchess for a daughter if she were only to be buried in a distant corner of the province and though her body would be carried there as she had perhaps desired, their parental vanity was cruelly offended. In fact they were not pleased with the mourners the Duke had just given orders to be hired.

"There was no lack of hungry beggars in Paris. One met troupes of them in the street gathering their pittance where they could. Many held out their cups on the steps of churches. They had their own especial posts there. They tried to melt compassionate hearts by the aspect of their ugliness. In default of any natural ones they feigned them, making their deformities all the more abominable since they did not have to suffer from them. It

was thus that beggary had become an industry. Sores and rags were the instrument of their trade and as these instruments are not dear, the number of those who employed them was not small. Thus the agents of the Duke de Grigny were at no trouble to fulfil his command and to enroll seven beggars who with their rags and tatters would mourn one who had been the most beautiful and finely gowned of all women.

"Meanwhile the rumor of these strange obsequies, being very rapidly communicated from mouth to mouth, reached my ears. Since the death of the Duchess de Grigny I had existed in an emotion that seemed a mixture of scorn and horror. This body whose lewd beauty I had glimpsed in one ardent night, was decayed and spoiled. Now it was to be taken I knew not whither and enclosed in a tomb. Why had not I, like the Count des Bertonnières, known its luxuries and its caresses? This thought devoured my mind with all the bitterness of remorse. Thus I experienced an irresistible longing to attend the ceremonies that were being prepared. For perhaps if I could only see the body of the Duchess being lowered into the ground I would free myself of the atrocious desire that tormented me. Perhaps I would find forgetfulness, a forgetful-

ness more consonant with those events whose empoisoned memory would only be a new cause of sorrow. On the other hand the insult a vindictive husband wished to add to his brutality, seemed to impose the duty upon me of not abandoning her for whom I had cherished so great an admiration. At these moments she ceased to be that half naked woman savagely pounced upon in her revels. She again became the noble lady whom I had once seen descending from her coach in the torchlight at the gate of Grigny Mansion, and whose image I kept engraved upon my heart. It was she whom I wished to accompany to the grave and to mourn with my tears.

"Having reached this decision I considered ways of putting it into action. I still possessed a little of the money I had earned from Master Pucelard. With these savings in my pocket I made my way to the church where the agents of his lord Duke had made their selection. For a long time I had known all the beggars there, for they were indeed those to whom I had occasionally flung a few pennies when I passed. Among their number was a certain Jean Ricouillot. A skin disease that covered his face rendered him extremely hideous, but kept him in a good humor for he scraped it off every evening

and smeared it on again the next day. Skilful in this artifice, he earned enough money to keep himself alive. I had no doubt that the odd fellow had been among the first to be selected. I was not mistaken and I explained my plan to him. He at once agreed to surrender his place to me. Though he was much astonished at my request he saw no obstacle to the deception. Moreover he accepted my proposition without fully understanding the pleasure I could find in jolting through the country behind a coffin, but the money I offered convinced him that it was all for the best. We made our arrangements. He promised to lend me the rags requisite to my new rôle and to paint my face with the dartre he so cleverly imitated upon his own. Thus made up, and my companions informed of the substitution, I would only need to present myself at Grigny Mansion and nothing would be noticed.

"When I appeared there the next evening I was very much troubled. I was told to join my companions in the room where they had already gathered. It was a dark, low room where shadows swarmed confusedly. Hardly had I entered than I was nearly suffocated by the stench, even though I had already become accustomed to that diffused by the rags honest Jean had tricked me out in. But

before I had time to reflect upon the disadvantages of my situation, I was roughly seized by two flunkeys, one of whom threw a long floating cloak over my back, while the other, having struck off my hat with the back of his hand, stuck a kind of cardboard crown upon my head. Startled, angry, I was about to ask what all this meant when lights were brought in and I was able to see what was happening.

"What a spectacle it was, Monsieur! I was on the point of stripping off my derisive cloak and my cardboard crown. Into what a strange carnival had I strayed! One by one I recognized the actors and I realized who was its false and execrable author. The first ones who struck my eyes were Jean Guilbert the hunchback, and Lucie Robine. Her face had been smeared bright red to represent the snout of a sow and her unclasped bodice revealed her sagging and gourdlike breasts. Lifting her skirts above her beribboned shoes she waddled about with her lean and bony carcass. A garland of flowers perched on her red and frowzy hair and thus caparisoned she simpered with all the airs of a broken-down courtesan. As for Jean Guilbert, he was clothed entirely in black and dragged a large loose sack at his heels. Farther away, Cuthy-de

Kent, all robed in yellow, wore a helmet interlaced with snakes and with tongues painted upon his back. Fat Claude Lardois in scarlet leaned on a halberd beside Jacques Ragoire who was bound with strings from which dangled sausages and puddings. Finally there was enormous Justine Le Cras, swollen with dropsy, and whose oily face with its blind eye seemed half asleep. From their necks dangled a card similar to the one I had been given. And as I read upon mine the word PRIDE in letters of gold, I could read on theirs the words LUST, AVARICE, ENVY, WRATH, GLUTTONY, SLOTH. For the Duchess de Grigny having requested that she be buried as a humble sinner, the Duke had therefore provided as mourners the figures of the Seven Sins themselves.

"When, thus travestied, we filed out of Grigny Mansion to enter the coaches we were to ride in, we found a mob awaiting us in the square. The people of the neighborhood had come to admire one who, scorning the pomp and vanity of the age, had only desired a funeral procession of a few paupers. This sort of renunciation had delighted the lower classes, who accepted it as a mark of humility and a proof that we differ from them rather more in our rank than in ourselves. They

like us to admit the equality of all in death and they were pleased with the Duchess de Grigny for having been mindful of a journey's end that is common to all flesh. But when they saw us file out they were for a moment aghast. If they had approved of this noble lady's escort of seven beggars, as a sign that before God's court she was no better than a humble beggar herself supplicating his mercy, what did they think of this spectacle that appeared before them? Did they understand its mockery and its shame? I cannot exactly say, but when we appeared a deep shout swept the mob. The Duke standing in full mourning beside his wife's coffin, which had already been loaded upon the hearse, raised his eyes.

"The moment, Monsieur, was a strange one. I had a notion that stones would be hurled at us and that hands would rip off our regalia. Torches held aloft by valets crudely set off our grotesque trappings. I had already raised my hands to my crown of gilded paper when, in the midst of the silence, there burst forth a laugh. It was immediately followed by a second, then by another, then twenty, then a hundred. Howls of laughter issued from gaping mouths and from flushed faces. From far and near laughter possessed the whole crowded

square, from women to old hags, from men to children, even to the torch bearers and even, Monsieur, to our very selves. Yes, Lust that was Lucie Robine, and Avarice that was Jean Guilbert the hunchback, screamed with laughter. Cuthy-de-Kent as Envy and fat Lardois as Wrath, and Gluttony that was Jacques Ragoire held their sides with laughter, and Justine Le Cras as Sloth, held her enormous belly between her two hands—yes, every one of them save the Duke de Grigny, who did not smile, but made a sign to the coachmen to drive their horses through the mob which seemed to have forgotten that behind our masquerade lurked for all of it, Monsieur, the real face of Death."

* * *

M. Herbou took breath and then continued.

"The coach I rode in followed the hearse on which the coffin rested. Four of the Duke's lackeys mounted and bearing torches accompanied it along the cobbled street that rudely jolted it. I was still completely stunned by our departure. Those yells, that laughter, still rang in my ears. I felt feverish. I wiped the sweat from my forehead and I felt there the cardboard crown I wore. Bit by bit the realization of the rôle I played in the lugubrious joke dawned upon me. I experienced extreme

shame for it and to distract my mind I glanced about me.

"At the rear of the coach sat fat Lardois beside bloated Justine Le Cras. On the bench before them Jacques Ragoire sat with me. Wrath, Sloth, Gluttony and Pride traveled together. Disgust gripped my throat and I stared out of the window. The streets we passed along were almost deserted and the coach lurched over the rough pavement. Often a passer-by would halt, astonished by our strange procession, and would disappear into the darkness.

"Finally we were outside of Paris. The torches of the lackeys lighted up the trees along the way. We passed carriages lined up at the side of the road to let us by. I heard the oaths of the coachman and the snapping of whips of the coach guards to which the lackeys responded with shouts of abuse. My companions, silent at first, began to converse. Their tongues were loosened. Lardois-the-Wrath had produced a bottle of wine from his clothes. There was an exchange of ribaldry. I believed that full of the scene they had just witnessed they would discuss it, but great was my astonishment when they began discussing the little tricks of their trade, their quarrels, and the details of their miserable existence, as calmly as if they were under the church porch with

their cups in hand, rather than taking part in this strange adventure that had thrown me among them. They said not a word about it. Neither did I and while they gabbled of their trade I withdrew into my corner.

"Thanks to God they ignored me during the whole trip and I need not repeat the ribaldry I heard and which I will spare you. Meanwhile we proceeded along our way. It was by no means a good road and large rocks often heaved up the coach wheels and tumbled us together. Ragoire took advantage of these opportunities to amorously pinch Justine who would become indignant and cuff him back into his place. Suddenly the procession stopped short. One of the horses hitched to the hearse had fallen and broken its harness. The beast had risen lame. The chief lackey announced that we would proceed to the first inn where we would try to procure another horse.

"We soon arrived at a village. Everyone was asleep in the Inn but after we had pounded on the door the innkeeper in a cotton nightcap appeared at the window. The sight of torches and coaches seemed to mollify him. He believed he was to do business with some traveler of distinction and he hastily descended to open the door for us.

"I will not try to describe his stupefaction when he beheld our masquerade. The chief lackey solemnly explained to him that we were the Seven Sins of the Duchess de Grigny whom we were accompanying to her last resting place. This shameless and facetious rogue so impressed the innkeeper that without understanding it all, he bowed to the floor and ushered into his kitchen those whom he very politely addressed as 'My Lords of the Sins.'

"The candles lighted, you can imagine that drinks were at once called for. The generosity of the Duke had filled all our pockets with *ecus*. You can also imagine the uproar and the racket. Bloated Justine tossed off her glass seated on the knees of Jacques Ragoire. Lucie Robine sprawling across the table, fed hers to Cuthy-de-Kent. The lackeys themselves joined the revelry and drank healths to their Lord Duke. They had pulled out their pipes and heavy clouds of tobacco smoke hung above our heads. The coachmen joined them and snapped their whips above us. Our outlandish array, rendered even more grotesque by our tinsel costumes, attracted all travelers at the hotel who had been roused from their beds by the uproar. Crowding at the door they admired this unexpected tableau of life-below-stairs.

"Finally sickened by the smell of wine and tobacco, I stepped out into the courtyard for a breath of fresh air. The gleaming windowpanes of the inn cast fantastic figures of light upon the ground. Indeed this village tavern in whose red windows danced such bizarre shadows gave the impression of being one of the chambers of hell.

"Not wishing to reënter this oven, I took refuge in one of the coaches. I reflected there upon my unlucky enterprise, but I nevertheless felt a great desire to pursue it to the bitter end and to accompany the remains of the Duchess to her last repose. Alas! Monsieur, those clinking glasses and that spilled wine led me to dream of a more delicate and more luxurious repast, and I again saw in her half-naked beauty she who now lay between four narrow boards, jolted by the plunging and rearing horses, attended by vile mourners, and insulted even in death by him whose name I heard noisily acclaimed by the hoarse voices of drunkards.

"Dawn had begun to break when it was decided to proceed. The lackeys reeling drunk had difficulty in clinging to their saddles. My companions in the coach were this time Lucie Robine, Cuthy-de-Kent and Jean Guilbert:—Lust, Envy, and Avarice. All three of them were so besotted with drink that

they dozed off at once. I will live a long time, Monsieur, before I forget the spectacle of their disgusting stupor, broken only by hiccoughs and nausea. Lucie Robine was particularly repugnant. Her costume, drenched with wine, stuck to her scrawny body and her closed eyes showed the raw edges of their lids. Daylight rendered her more frightful still, for it was now bright morning.

"The morning promised fair weather. The road passed along cultivated fields and meadows covered by a light mist which little by little was dissipated by the sun. We skirted a little river flowing between willow trees, whose course was sometimes smooth and sometimes ruffled by pebbles. I breathed the pure and wholesome air. I would have liked to leap from this coach, contaminated with filth and with foul breath, where Robine slept with her mouth agape and Jean Guilbert snored. Yes, Monsieur, I wished to flee and run among the trees, to fling away my gilt crown and bathe in that cool and limpid stream. For the first time in many days I thought of my little flute, so clear and sweet, and which I loved to play. If I had only had it with me! I would have lain beneath a tree and I would have made it echo the murmuring brook and the voice of birds.

"We were to arrive at about three or four o'clock in the afternoon where the Duchess de Grigny had willed her body to be buried in that earth her childish feet had trodden with Monsieur de Cérac. It was at the town of Salignon one left the highway to approach the château of Monsieur de Barandin. It was already after two and we had not even reached this hamlet. Since our departure from the inn neither the coachmen nor the lackeys had dreamed of making certain of the road we should follow, so completely had the libations of the night before addled their brains. They planned to inquire the way at the first village. We soon saw it nestling in a valley. As we approached the sound of music drifted to our ears and upon entering the village square we observed that the inhabitants were dancing beneath the overhanging branches of lindens to the sound of bagpipes and tambourines.

"Our procession of coaches caused no little surprise among the dancers which increased when the mounted lackeys hove into sight. The dancers drew to one side of the road to let us pass. The tumblers and jugglers paused in their tricks, and drinkers abandoned their bottles. When we had reached the center of the square the crowd's astonishment gave

way to joy, and one of the villagers who seemed to be the leader, bowed politely to the chief lackey. Our masquerade suggested to these good folk that we were a troup of traveling actors and their representative requested us to honor their rustic festival with our talents. It was necessary to undeceive them and to inform them that our company was not what they supposed, that we had other business than to parade or dance, and that the large coffer that went before us did not contain our change of costume, but the body of the Duchess de Grigny which we were taking by the shortest route to her eternal resting place.

"It was then that we learned that we were on the wrong road and that we must take a cross-country lane if we wished to make the château of Monsieur de Barandin before nightfall. This news was very ill received inside the coaches. The clowns they carried complained of the fatigues of the journey. Their throats were parched and the sight of bottles had revived their thirst. Therefore we did not proceed until everyone's thirst had been quenched, to the great scandal of the good townfolk who crossed themselves as we passed, persuaded that we were madmen who were being escorted to an asylum and the better to lead us to our destination

we had been gulled into this strange game to indulge our madness.

"Meanwhile as we struggled painfully along this cross-country road the surroundings began to take on a different aspect. The land became wilder, with huge rocks jutting out among stunted trees and with stretches of sandy wasteland. The most cultivated realms have barren lands like these whose slight yield discourage man's toil upon them. The territory through which we were now passing appeared more and more terrifying, for the gathering twilight added an indefinable strangeness to the distorted objects that we passed. Lucie Robine had ceased to drink and Cuthy-de-Kent had tossed his empty bottle through the window. As for Jean Guilbert, he curled up under his hunched back and mumbled *pater nosters* between his gaping teeth. I myself fell into a mood of despair which increased when we entered an alley of tall, gnarled oaks whose twisted branches seemed to threaten us and under whose shadows it was as dank and gloomy as the corridor of a cavern.

"This avenue led to a poor little hamlet whose houses were grouped about a small church. In the distance rose the two pointed towers of the château of Monsieur de Baradin. It did not look well, this

venerable manor, Monsieur, with its roofs and turrets, and it was surrounded by a greenish water that reflected it dismally. Some large out-buildings stood at a little distance. Frogs croaked in the rushes of the moat. Bats flitted through the dark air. I had difficulty in believing that this evil place could have produced that beautiful woman with golden hair who from Mademoiselle de Barandin had become the Duchess de Grigny. While I was indulging in these reflections, the lackeys were attempting to make themselves heard inside the château. Waving their lighted torches they were raising a great clamor at the drawbridge. Finally a grotesque looking face appeared at a window. It was that of an old fellow with gray hair who seemed out of sorts for having been disturbed. Moreover, when the chief lackey shouted what we were there for, the fellow replied in a surly voice that he had received no orders from Monsieur de Barandin, that he would not open the door to strangers, and that, if they continued near the moat he would let them know that it did not pay to loiter near his gate. With these words he aimed his musket at the lackeys and would doubtless have discharged it had not the rogues who were bothering him leaped behind the coaches for protection.

"We were still there when the inhabitants of the hamlet, attracted by the shouts and torches, ran to our aid. Upon learning that the coffin contained the body of Mademoiselle de Barandin they were greatly distressed. The Duchess in memory of her childhood there had revisited it, had distributed liberal gifts among the townspeople. These honest villagers assured us that nothing could be obtained from the keeper of the château and that to confer with him again would simply be to expose ourselves to his musket. Moreover they told us that the priest would be away until the following day and that he had taken the key to the church. There thus remained only the out-buildings where we could sleep. They offered to bring fodder for our horses and straw for us to sleep on. The priest upon his return the next morning would perform the burial service for which the Duke de Grigny had not bothered to make any preparations, just as Monsieur and Madame de Barandin had not arranged to have their daughter's body received properly at their château. I imagine that deep in their hearts they could not forgive her for the eccentricity of her will, which had in turn justified the strange conduct of the Duke."

M. Herbou stopped speaking. M. de Bréot would

have pressed him to complete his story had not M. Herbou continued it himself.

"It was in the stable, the best preserved of these half-ruined buildings, that we had to sleep. The hearse that bore the coffin of the Duchess was pushed under some sort of shed. If, fortunately enough, the straw the village folk gave us to sleep on was very dry, the bread and cheese they offered us was not less so. After a few mouthfuls I stretched out on my back and closed my eyes, half dead with fatigue. The villagers had lent us two large lanterns. They cast a dim light through the stable. I occasionally opened my eyes. I observed the members of our strange equipage huddling together on the floor asleep. The lackeys snored. Not far from me sprawled Lucie Robine beside Cuthy-de-Kent. Gluttony, Envy, Wrath, Sloth, Lust and Avarice lay side by side. Justine Le Cras and Jean Guilbert the hunchback, snored together. My eyes closed again, their lids weighing down upon them like lead.

"I do not know how long I slept, but I awoke at the sound of stirred straw. I saw Jean Guilbert rise stealthily and tiptoe towards the stable door. The hunched shadow of his back glowered on the wall and disappeared. A moment later I saw Jacques

Ragoire rise too and leave. Then all was silence again. A tiny bat flittered in the light of a lantern. The coach horses pawed the ground with their hoofs. Jean Guilbert and Jacques Ragoire did not return. A short time had passed when I shuddered with a dim suspicion. Rising to my hands and knees I crawled to the door.

"Without, the night was dark but full of stars. I took a deep breath. Little by little my eyes became accustomed to the darkness. At the end of a moment I distinguished a vague light glimmering behind the wall where the coffin of the Duchess was sheltered. I moved toward it cautiously. The damp grass deadened the sound of my footsteps. I moved forward a little more when in the light of a torch, this, Monsieur, is what I beheld:

"Jean Guilbert, the hunchback, holding a torch, stood beside the coffin on which Jacques Ragoire had placed his foot. To pry open the coffin lid he had introduced the iron point of that halberd-shaped instrument which Jean Lardois bore to represent the character of Wrath. Ragoire was using it as a lever. From time to time he uttered a little grunt of exertion. The hunchback pointed with his finger where he should pry and moved his torch back and forth which made their fearful shadows

sway on the ground. The two scoundrels, doubtless hoping the Duchess wore jewels upon her body planned to strip them off. The sight of the sacrilege revolted me. I would have cried out, but not even a whisper issued from my throat and I stood motionless, mute and impotent.

"They continued their revolting task. The wood cracked under the pressure of the halberd. I could clearly descry their every movement. Little by little the coffin lid gave way. I was dumb with horror and breathless with curiosity. She whom I had often admired in her beautiful clothes, she indeed whom I had beheld half naked in the revels of a night that I could not remember without trembling, she whose remains I had accompanied hither in ignominious disguise, she, Monsieur, was about to appear for the last time and swathed in her burial shroud. And the idea of that sight, Monsieur, turned my trembling body to water.

"Suddenly the coffin lid burst open and Ragoire toppled over on his back. Jean Guilbert, beside himself with haste, gripped the torch with one hand while with the other he rummaged in the yawning coffin. I watched his long arm move. His hunched back gave him the aspect of a monstrous and ravenous spider. Ragoire leaned over the coffin, too, and

drew forth something that seemed to be a skein of golden silk. It was, twined about his hand, the hair of the Duchess.

"I longed to fling myself upon the rogues. My foot struck against a stone. I do not know how, but I hurled it at the legs of Jean Guilbert, who dropped his torch. Ragoire uttered a half smothered shriek. I heard them panting as they hurried past and disappeared into the night. The torch lay flaring on the ground.

"My hands trembled so that I had difficulty in picking it up. Slowly I bent over the coffin. The Duchess lay within it, swathed in so fine a cloth that I could distinguish all the contours of her body. Death had respected its loveliness. She lay half turned on her side in such a way that I could not see her face, but only her beautiful unbound hair that seemed to rise toward me as if it would twine about my fingers, fetter my knees, bind me with its innumerable strands. It seemed to rise and come toward me. It was of gold and it was of fire. It allured like treasures and it gleamed like flame.

"The wasting torch burned me cruelly. I too, let it fall. The golden hair vanished.

"I leaped back. How did I reach the stable where the horses were? I do not know. When I recovered

my senses I was flying across the fields, clinging to the horse's back. Dawn whitened the horizon. The beat of the horse's hoofs rang in my ears. I was not a good rider then and it was by a miracle I clung that far to the beast's back.

"Suddenly the horse veered and threw me. My head struck against the stump of a tree and it was only many hours later that the servants of Count des Raguiers picked me up and made me swallow some cordial. For they believed they might amuse their master by bringing him this strange fellow painted like a clown, Monsieur, and costumed like the King of Diamonds."

CHAPTER SIX

HOW MONSIEUR HERBOU CONCLUDED THE STORY HE HAD RECOUNTED TO MONSIEUR DE BRÉOT

M. HERBOU had ceased to speak. M. de Bréot glanced about the room. Everything well revealed the path M. Herbou had climbed since that morning when the servants of Count des Raguiers had picked up this same M. Herbou lying dressed as Pride along their road. M. de Bréot decided that one must never despair of Fortune, for she has many and devious ways to clothe us in new and unexpected garments. By one of those astonishing twists of fate, M. Herbou who had begun life in the miserable lodging of a poor tapestry worker, was ending it in a mansion adorned with the most precious furnishings and surrounded by every luxury. M. Herbou was rich, M. Herbou was without doubt happy. Could it then be possible that after so long a time he still was troubled by that adventure he had just related to M. de Bréot? Yet he had noted that M. Herbou during the course

of his story had more than once displayed emotion, as if its recollection still disturbed him.

M. de Bréot was occupied with these reflections when M. Herbou interrupted him suddenly.

"I am certain that you are asking yourself how among all the many and diverse adventures I have since then experienced, I can so vividly recall the one I have just related. Its remembrance in fact is somewhat astonishing for I should have lost it along my way. It has not been an easy road I have traveled to attain that summit where you now see me. Money is more difficult to acquire than glory. The profession of becoming rich, Monsieur, is arduous and I early realized the obligations imposed upon those who are and have nothing. Among them I will include the obligation of entering the service of Count des Raguiers. For this noble's livery I exchanged that of my playing-card costume which was, I must admit, the first trump of my career. But it was not by folding my hands that I rose from my condition, but rather by considering what I had to suffer and undertake to achieve success. I do not mean to boast in telling you that luck is not the only requisite, but audacity and cleverness also. Try to imagine this ascent of a rungless ladder. Would I have succeeded without the aid of a secret

strength? No. And that secret strength sprang from what I have just told you."

M. Herbou lapsed into silence and sighed.

"I derived from that adventure, Monsieur, a furious desire to become rich."

M. de Bréot glanced at M. Herbou.

"Yes, Monsieur. It had laid hold upon me unaware as I galloped along, blindly clinging to my horse's mane. I bore in my eyes the golden luster of the Duchess de Grigny's hair. It gleamed through the memory of her loveliness and it was then that I forever realized, Monsieur, the horror of being poor."

M. Herbou became reanimated as he spoke.

"Was it not due to my poverty and my lowliness that I owed the frightful remorse that devastated my heart and wet my cheeks with tears? Ah! if instead of being a simple flute-player in the little troup of Monsieur Pucelard had I like Count des Bertonnières but been a young earl at Court, the Duchess de Grigny would have doubtless also granted me that luxury she indulged in less for her pleasure than for her vengeance. Like any other I might have served the rancor she cherished toward the Duke, for the death of young Monsieur de Cérac. I will add that this remorse, not of one

period, but of my whole life, and which I still suffer from today with an intensity and a bitterness time has not assuaged, has compelled me to take oath ever more to avoid all others like it.

"I therefore have sworn never to conceive for woman any desire I could not find the means of satisfying, over all if that desire were akin to what is known as love. I did not care to suffer a second time the ceaseless torture which my hopeless passion for the Duchess had caused me to endure. To encompass my purpose I fiercely resolved to become rich, for gold is ever the swiftest way of attaining what one longs for. Thanks to my money it has never again been my fate to love someone without that someone at least dissembling a mutual passion. I do not say that this has not sometimes cost me dear, but Monsieur Herbou has the wherewithal to pay what the most beautiful of women ask and none has placed so high a price upon herself that I have not been able to overbid what she believed it worth.

"It is in this way that I have been able to protect my heart from those sterile and smothered longings that torture one so cruelly, and thus have I been able to preserve to an age no longer that of youth, my good humor and my looks, even though

there often returns to my mind the memory of that adventure which I ask you to reflect upon. It contains a moral that might not be entirely unproductive, though for me it is a memory I prefer not to dwell upon, since nothing in the world, Monsieur, can prevent it from having been."

As M. Herbou paused and as M. de Bréot was about to take leave of him, a lackey appeared to inform M. Herbou that the Prince de Thuines asked to see him.

"That is just as it should be," said M. Herbou, when he had ordered the lackey to show the Prince in, "and he comes at just the proper time to stir us from our present mood, you from the one my story may have aroused and I from one it has restored. Indeed, I am certain that His Grace will sustain me in what I have just told you. For if I have afforded you with one way of avoiding love, I wager that His Grace will supply you with another and that between the two you can choose a way of ridding yourself of a certain melancholy that I read in your eyes and that bodes you nothing good."

The entrance of the Prince de Thuines was splendid. M. de Bréot was at last able to admire this gentleman near at hand whom heretofore he had seen only at a distance. Consequently M. de Bréot

observed him attentively. It would have been difficult to discover anyone more handsome or more insolent than the Prince de Thuines. Naturally the conversation between M. Herbou and His Grace dropped into matters of gallantry. At one point M. Herbou happened to ask the Prince if he were still amorous of Mme. de Gorbes.

"Amorous? Amorous?" he replied. "But are you not attempting to render me ridiculous in the eyes of your friend by passing me off as someone of another century?"

And the Prince, laughing, assumed an offended air.

"Have you found, Monsieur," continued the Prince, turning to M. de Bréot, "anything more disgusting or vulgar than being amorous of a woman? To meet her, to plead with her, to make promises to her, to lie to her, and all to obtain something she does us the effrontery of not being the first to desire of us. It is certainly the most repulsive business in the world. And yet that is not all; there is the arranging for trysting places, the circumventing of obstacles, the making certain of appointments, all of these being rather a valet's business than a gentleman's diversion. How can noble hearted men descend to such matters? If women

have pretentions toward love let them do otherwise than require those petty duties of us. Of course if they honestly resist there would be some reason for forcing them to do the opposite of what they desire, but remember that it is when they are most desirous that they compel us to have it of them only after a thousand cares and pains. In truth, it is woman's turn to give and ours to receive and I do not think, Monsieur, that you who are a new arrival in this city and are handsome besides, should cast your lot among graybeards and lightheads who still comport themselves in the old manner. I also hope, Monsieur, that if you have designs upon some lady you will let her understand that it is not yours to resist any which she in her turn cannot fail to have upon you."

While the Prince de Thuines spoke, M. de Bréot listened politely to his discourse, meanwhile gazing out of the window that opened on M. Herbou's garden. Between the rows of trimmed boxwood a fountain played in sheaf-like jets of water and it seemed to M. de Bréot he could distinguish the wet and naked body of the Nymph who lived within it and who recalled the silvery grace of the charming Mme. de Blionne.

CHAPTER SEVEN

IN WHICH MONSIEUR DE BERCAILLÉ
REAPPEARS TO DISAPPEAR

It was not that M. de Bréot cherished for fair Marguerite Géraud a violent passion comparable to that which M. Herbou the Contractor had depicted in his story of the Duchess de Grigny, nor was it a ceaseless and melancholy yearning which sight of Mme. de Blionne had produced in his heart; but he none the less experienced a keen pleasure in beholding the full and smiling countenance of this young woman. She had even extended her complaisance to the point of permitting M. de Bréot to know that her loveliness did not stop at her wimple, but was continued downward through firm breasts, a round waist, smooth hips, glossy stomach, firm thighs, slender legs, until it finally culminated in two dainty little feet.

The enjoyment of these luxuries afforded M. de Bréot a sufficient excuse to repair frequently to the shop of Master Géraud, lutist, at the sign of the

Silver Lyre. He had come across the shop quite by accident, but had at once realized that customers were well treated there. Amiable Marguerite Géraud expended every effort to please everyone and thereby produced the impression that the Silver Lyre was the best stocked and the most reasonable shop in the quarter.

M. de Bréot was wholly convinced of this truth. There was, forsooth, no little pleasure in making purchases when one was waited upon with eager cordiality and in seeing one's money pass not into greedy claws that seemed itching to tear you, but into gentle hands that seemed to accept it rather as a souvenir than as silver tendered for purchased goods. It was exactly this impression the lutist's wife could give, for she performed her work with the most perfect graciousness. Therefore M. de Bréot came often to the Silver Lyre.

Moreover he had not failed to note that the lute strings one procured there were of a superior quality and that they gave forth rich and delicate tones. Master Géraud was deeply grateful for the compliments paid to his merchandise and amiable Marguerite did not rebuff those addressed to her. Master Géraud was not too vexed if he occasionally overheard them, although his ear was more

atune to the harmony of his instruments than to what was uttered to his wife. He was an excellent fellow, extremely accommodating and entirely engrossed by his profession. He puttered about his workshop while customers fluttered about his wife. He dusted and cleaned his instruments while his wife responded to gallantries over the counter.

It was a pleasant place, this shop of Master Géraud. Instruments of every kind formed a natural decoration whose charm was enhanced by the richness of their varied shapes and by the precious material of which they were frequently made. There were those constructed of rare wood and inlaid with mother-of-pearl or with ivory, while the exotic structure of others delighted the eye. The wasp-waisted violins hung near the round tabors or beside the gnarly flutes and fifes. All these instruments were suspended in garlands along the walls, while some dangling from the ceiling swung there imperceptibly, among them being a fat-bellied lute which like a wingless bird seemed ready to lay its sonorous egg.

The spectacle of these instruments delighted M. de Bréot and he often lingered in the shop to muse upon them. Little by little it seemed to him that all these instruments were alive and he believed he

heard their silent concert, accompanied by the silvery laughter of the pretty clerk whose white teeth were of an ivory worthy of being inlaid upon the finger board of a viol, or on the belly of a lute and whose blond hair might moan deliciously beneath a bow. These fancies brought M. de Bréot back to the young woman's face. The thoughts her face aroused in him were doubtless so apparent upon his own that she could readily divine the course they followed. Marguerite did not seem displeased. Little by little the presence of M. de Bréot filled her with sufficient pleasure to arouse dreams of meeting him elsewhere than in public or under the eyes of Master Géraud, who without showing signs of jealousy, was nevertheless a husband. Though he was occupied by his work he was not occupied to such an extent as to be rendered incapable of understanding what the eyes of his wife proposed to M. de Bréot.

Master Géraud prided himself upon the fact that his shop supplied whatever one desired, irrespective of the instrument one played. Thus he was considerably put out when M. de Bréot one day asked for a certain type of lute string which it happened Master Géraud did not have in stock. At first he swore that no string of the kind existed,

but he ended by assuring M. de Bréot that he understood what was required and that he would procure one by the following day. M. de Bréot responded politely that he was in no great hurry for it and he had already forgotten the lute maker's promise, when the next afternoon he heard a knock at the door of his room. The door opened and with no little astonishment he beheld Marguerite Géraud herself on the threshold standing with lowered eyes and clutching a little parcel in her hand.

She entered modestly, but without that vivacious smile with which she greeted customers in her shop. M. de Bréot thanked her ceremoniously for having put herself to so much trouble and was fumbling about for words, when with a peal of laughter she closed the door behind her and pressed her lips against his mouth. . . .

Thereafter she frequently came to visit M. de Bréot and each time they enjoyed each other's company. Marguerite was ardent and pious. She willingly sacrificed the hour of mass to her lover, also adding the time required for those various errands she gave as pretext for her absence from the shop. Some afternoons M. de Bréot would disrobe the young woman of only what was necessary; while at other times he would undress her com-

pletely, the better to enjoy her body. After having contemplated her standing in all her whiteness he would tuck her into bed and lie down beside her. He found delight in feeling her flesh against his flesh; not that he was deeply in love with his mistress, but he was young, it was spring, and it is never unpleasant to experience a desire that one can heed during only its immediate promptings.

One day when they were enjoying that moment which follows others that have been sweeter, there came a sharp knock at the door. M. de Bréot had only time to leap to his feet and Marguerite to hide her face, when M. Floreau de Bercaillé appeared on the threshold. What he beheld could have left him in no doubt that he was inopportune, but he displayed no sign of embarrassment and taking a few steps into the room with his hat in his hand, he made a beautiful bow to the naked body of Marguerite and to M. de Bréot who was hastily pulling on his underdrawers. Then, being in no wise disconcerted, he sat down in the chair near him and after a moment of silence turned to M. de Bréot. The latter resigned himself to the intrusion by recollecting that M. de Bercaillé at the fête of Verduron had hospitably received him, though in bed at the time with a little red headed servant

girl, and that, moreover, the demands of nature are common to all. Thus he could not help laughing when M. de Bercaillé remarked:

"Well, well, Monsieur, you are eternally at this sport, for it seems that your tastes have not yet developed beyond boyish pranks."

And M. de Bercaillé pointed with his finger at what the young woman was vainly striving to conceal from the indiscreet visitor.

"It is true," continued M. Floreau de Bercaillé, "that if you still relish this amusement, I can only applaud your choice. This young lady whose face I cannot discern seems to have a most prepossessing exterior. I have rarely been allowed to admire rosier flesh, although (and I know a thing or two about it) the most attractive and luscious looking fruits are not without their perils. Finally, Monsieur, if I must compliment you, I must also beg your pardon for my blunt entrance here. I have interrupted you at a moment that one does not like to have snatched away; but I implore you to disregard my presence. I have too many grave problems to meditate upon in the meanwhile for the spectacle to distract me. Therefore, Monsieur, proceed just as if I were not present and when you have done, I will explain the reason for my visit."

M. de Bercaillé placed his large hat on the table. Observing, however, that M. de Bréot appeared in no humor to do anything more important than to listen to him, he added:

"Monsieur, you must lend me fifteen *ecus*."

Forgetting the costume he was at that moment wearing, M. de Bréot reached for his pockets.

"Fifteen *ecus!* Yes, Monsieur," continued M. de Bercaillé, "and I assure you that I do not intend to drink them up in a tavern, nor even to buy me something fancy. I have renounced such purchases for good since you last saw me and I no longer cherish those ideas which you once knew I held. Nevertheless, Monsieur, one must eat, for man lives also by bread and not alone by words that tumble from the mouth of God."

And M. de Bercaillé heaved a sigh from the depths of his empty stomach.

"You are probably astonished to see me in this condition," continued M. Floreau de Bercaillé, "not that my lack of money can surprise you for it is customary for poets to be unblessed of fortune, but what should impress you as most strange is that the fine flame of Libertinism is quenched within me; that flame which formerly caused me never to mention the name of God without immediately

sprinkling it with those spicy jests that so delighted the Prince de Thuines and which were generally whispered about. It was in this habitual frame of mind that you ran across me a year ago in that little inn where I was delighted to discover you as someone who shared, if it may be so expressed, my convictions on the fundamentals of all things."

These remarks of M. de Bercaillé caused M. de Bréot to smile. They reminded him of the outcome of this meeting with M. de Bercaillé. He owed him much, and in particular the friendship of the Marquise de Preignelay at whose fête he had conversed with M. Le Varlon de Verrigny and had beheld Mme. de Blionne dance. Indeed, the body of the young woman who now lay beneath the bedclothes and whom he gently caressed to keep her patient, was sweet, well-fashioned, and lovely to look upon. He was aware of the furtive glances M. de Bercaillé cast in the direction of her nakedness. M. de Bréot appreciated the pleasure of enjoying it, but he well knew that when the fair Marguerite dressed herself in her everyday clothes he would not think of her a moment afterwards. M. de Bréot had often proved himself capable of forgetting his mistress. He suddenly found himself dreaming of another body than hers. It ap-

peared to him all naked under the transparent silver of her gown, radiant with music and with light. And the remembrance of Mme. de Blionne returned to him so clearly and poignantly that he closed his eyes and it required no little effort for him to reply to M. Floreau de Bercaillé.

"Yes, Monsieur, though your metamorphosis or conversion is quite astonishing, it seems to me that it had already begun when I called at your room to ask you to teach Monsieur Le Varlon de Verrigny that system of ideas which is so estranged from you now. The profession of Libertinism, as you described it, already appeared less profitable to you and you gave me to understand that you were after all quite as capable as anyone else of believing in God. And if you have really embraced that belief I would be interested to know from your own mouth how you reached the decision that I really never expected of you."

"Monsieur," replied M. Floreau de Bercaillé, modestly, "I will explain everything and in full detail, provided this charming young lady consents to retire completely beneath the covers, for I am beginning to find the vista of her body slightly disconcerting and . . ."

Marguerite Géraud keeping her face carefully

hidden, drew, with the help of M. de Bréot, the rest of the covers over her body. M. Floreau de Bercaillé appeared satisfied and continued with these words:

"You must be aware, Monsieur, that certain events which I will not enlarge upon greatly injured me with certain people. We are always forgiven our own pleasures, but everyone frowns upon us when we busy ourselves about the pleasures of others. A word which you doubtless know is commonly used to describe this complaisancy. The affair of Monsieur Le Varlon de Verrigny has done me no end of harm in society. If I had only kept this little Annette Courboin to myself all would have been for the best. . . . But enough. . . . Add to this the fact that the Marquise de Preignelay tightened her purse strings more and more. She accorded my compositions a very thin sort of reception. She declared that my imagination was exhausted, that I had lost that fire which had formerly endued my works with so much brilliance. It is true that my fount of genius has run dry. Ordinarily I borrowed from humble little mortals those traits with which I clothed my goddesses, and the miserable condition that little serving maid at Verduron reduced me to has kept me from

replenishing my genius with its customary fuel. Here I am, then, in my bare attic all alone between my dry inkwell and my pot of herb tea. My health no longer permits me to repair to the tavern. Farewell to the good bumpers of wine, pipes of tobacco, bacon omelettes, and all those luxuries which are the privilege, nay, the banner of Libertines. Yes, of atheism there remained only atheism itself. What kind of a Libertine is he who goes to bed with the chickens, wakes at cockcrow, who abandons himself to neither the sins of the flesh nor of the belly and who lives like any common wretch? What a wonderful thing it is, forsooth, to disbelieve in God if it is unaccompanied by those luxuries and delights which believers deny themselves in the expectation of another life, and which will repay them in overplus for what they have foregone in this one! It is a cheat, Monsieur, and I have resolved to be duped no longer and to make the leap for good."

And M. Floreau de Bercaillé, making as if he were about to hop over a brook, then continued:

"I confess that I counted upon my conversion to recover my eminence in society. It seemed to me that it ought to win everyone's heart and procure me a universal welcome. This return to God would

afford religion a confirmation for which it could not fail to repay me. What is more efficacious in exalting or in raising our estimation of our own convictions than to see them embraced by someone who until then has treated them with the greatest contempt? Such were my fancies, Monsieur, and I was all the more certain my act would be effective as it was not the result of a sudden visitation of grace (which no one without vanity can expect) but rather the result of a reasonable and circumspect decision that everyone has, so to speak, within reach; not one of those impulses of which one is not the master, but a definite and serious desire which all men of honesty can impose on themselves."

M. de Bercaillé remained silent a moment.

"You expect me, Monsieur," he continued with a sneer, "to describe the various inner combats I experienced to achieve my victory. You imagine that I found a terrific struggle necessary to uproot the stubborn network of atheism and the tenacious stump of those ideas that were rooted within me. You would see self-examinations, transports, relapses, penitence, bloody sweats, all that is common in similar cases. Undeceive yourself, Monsieur. Nothing was easier or simpler and I do not doubt

that when the day comes you will see things as I do."

M. de Bercaillé paused. Marguerite Géraud stirred impatiently under the covers and revealed one of her legs. M. de Bercaillé continued:

"It is exactly as I have the honor of explaining to you, only when the moment comes, do not attempt to reason or draw conclusions. The arguments for believing or not believing are identical. We have particular ones for being Libertines as others have particular ones for not being Libertines. They are the same, Monsieur, and the whole question is to choose between them, without too much cogitation. To believe in God, Monsieur, is hardly anything more than gulping down one of those pills which one takes care not to dispute about or taste, but merely to await its salubrious effects."

And M. de Bercaillé performed a movement of his throat as if swallowing something that made his Adam's apple rise in his withered neck.

"Do not smile, Monsieur," continued M. Floreau de Bercaillé, "for I speak sincerely and I have resolved to accompany my conversion with every possible sign that it is complete and entirely above board. I began it by modifying my manner of speech. It is by speech, rather perhaps than by

deeds, that we are judged. I renounced that crude and picturesque language which was habitual with me and I substituted an almost unbelievable amount of unction, sedateness, and sincerity. I behaved everywhere with the most extreme decorum. I haunted churches, attended sermons and took part in holy processions. I fairly abused the sacrament. I received Holy Communion almost in excess. I composed hymns and chants. I presented the Marquise de Preignelay with the loveliest. She listened to them with a rapt ear, praised them to the sky, and dispatched me without so much as an *ecu*. Everywhere I was treated in the same way and that is the reason I come to you, hoping that you will give me a better reception."

M. Floreau de Bercaillé meditated for a moment or two. Marguerite took advantage of the moment to peek over the edge of the sheet to see what the tiresome visitor looked like. M. de Bercaillé did not impress her favorably. His complexion, no longer ruddy with wine, had lost all its color. He seemed pitiful and thin and his natural goatish smell was mingled with a faint odor of the sacristy. Meanwhile he held his peace, but suddenly he burst out:

"Good Christians are a singular race of beings, Monsieur. On the one hand we have those who con-

sider it so natural and reasonable for one to strive to believe what they do, that they see no merit in the attempt, nor anything worthy of their consideration; while others on the contrary seem offended at anyone who ceases to hold beliefs different from theirs. Libertinism seems an excellent thing for other people than they to believe in. I swear to you that this latter group accepts my conversion as an unbecoming and misplaced familiarity. They consider it an impudent attempt on my part to equal them and they are not insensible to its audacity. Finally, Monsieur, they do not like to see the body of Libertines diminished; for are they not a mangy flock branded in advance to feel the wrath of God? On the day of judgment God's diligence in well chastising them will divert his divine judgment from too narrowly investigating the transgressions of ordinary sinners, who will, because of God's preoccupation with Libertines, escape more cheaply. Thus, Monsieur, have I seen everyone draw away from me and it is to a Libertine like you that I am finally reduced to repair."

M. de Bréot felt very much disposed to comfort poor M. Floreau de Bercaillé in his manifold troubles and perplexities, but before putting an end to them he asked him why, since he had not found what

he had expected in religion, he did not return to the beliefs he had abandoned. M. de Bercaillé shrugged his shoulders with discouragement, then his face suddenly flushed and thumping the table with his fist he sprang to his feet.

"Do not consider that for a moment, Monsieur. They would chortle over it with too much vain glory. Would you have a Floreau de Bercaillé prove himself a disappointed man or confess himself incapable of what he has undertaken? No, I will be saved in spite of them and of whatever they may say about me, and I will prove it is not so difficult as they pretend it is. How astounded will the good Marquise de Preignelay be when she sees me ascend on high in the cowl and cassock of an eremite, for such is the order I intend to embrace. I have been informed of a little hermitage not far from the inn where we first met. The last hermit who lived there eloped with the little waitress who poured us that fragrant wine, if you remember her. I shall take his place. The hut is very clean and is situated on the outskirts of the forest. The country is sufficiently settled so that one can live there comfortably. The natives are pious and travelers are charitable. It is there I plan to retire. I will let my beard grow. Upstairs at the Courboins I will procure

clothing proper to my condition. It is to that purpose that I will put the *ecus* you have just given me, and I do not doubt that one day you will perhaps visit me there, for Libertinism runs its course and one tires of everything, even of such fair ladies as the one you have there beneath your hand. Whereupon, Monsieur, I leave you to your own pleasant devices and I am setting forth toward mine, for when one involves oneself in a belief in God, Monsieur, he must have the last word."

And M. Floreau de Bercaillé, after having pocketed the fifteen *ecus* M. de Bréot had handed him, departed without closing the door, while behind him fair Marguerite Géraud standing all naked on the bed, beautifully represented those temptations that appear to honest hermits in Flemish paintings.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HOW MONSIEUR LE VARLON DE VERRIGNY
DID SPLENDID THOUGH UNNECESSARY PENITENCE
AND THE EXCELLENT ADVICE MONSIEUR
DE LA BÉGISSIÈRE VOUCHSAFED HIM

M. LE VARLON DE VERRIGNY, ensconced in his coach which was conveying him to the convent of Port Royal des Champs, prepared a very beautiful harangue. He planned to address it to his sister when she appeared at the grille of the receiving room. During the progress along the moonlit road while the horses' hoofs rang on the pavement, he carefully burnished his periods and prepared to deliver them with all proper unction. Gestures give weight to one's eloquence and M. Le Varlon de Verrigny had some expectation of heightening the effect of what he uttered by his manner of uttering it. Mother Julie Angélique would thus be advised, in a language whose elegance and power could not fail to impress her, of the various reasons which had led her brother at crack of dawn to a seclusion which he resolved never to leave and to which he brought less the remnants of a sinner

than the genesis of a saint. Moreover, M. Le Varlon de Verrigny felt no little pride in his renaissance.

He felt he was a spectacle all in himself and a spectacle that did not lack grandeur since it was the effect of God's very particular and very especial grace. Indeed the Lord sometimes permits those whom he favors to burst suddenly from sin, though for the most part he permits them to emerge from it little by little, or so to speak, by degrees. It is given to only a very few to abandon it in one sudden, brilliant, and unpremeditated leap and in the twinkling of an eye to discover themselves beyond its bournes. The manner in which he had expelled his iniquities should doubtless raise him in the eyes and estimation of mankind to a sort of pinnacle, for he afforded all human beings a beautiful and striking example of the enviable method one can employ to eject in one brief evening the miserable habits of a whole life. Thus M. Le Varlon de Verrigny would not have been greatly astonished had he beheld crowds thronging at each side of the road; crowds who had hastened there to behold the magnificent and elevating spectacle he in his own person offered them.

However he was forced to admit that his passage did not produce the effects he had so easily im-

agined. The road was deserted and remained so. As the coach proceeded the moon sank in the west and its light waned. Shapes which had sunk into darkness again with the sinking moon, now little by little detached themselves from their shadows, and M. Le Varlon de Verrigny began to distinguish the shapes of trees and houses. They were somnolent and desolate. A little village through which the coach rumbled only revealed closed shutters and locked doors, and no one rushed to the threshold to behold M. Le Varlon de Verrigny whirling by in his coach bound for God. So deserted and peopleless was the village that M. Le Varlon de Verrigny who had thrust his head out the coach window, withdrew it and settled back against his cushions disgruntled, with nothing else to do than to polish the periods of his discourse and to enhance its eloquence.

Meanwhile, as he drew toward Port Royal, day began to dawn. M. Le Varlon was in great haste to arrive there. At last he perceived the buildings of the convent in its vale of solitude. Cocks crowed. A bell rang sweetly. A dog barked at the halted coach and M. Le Varlon de Verrigny, dismounting, knocked firmly at the door. Once inside, he asked to be shown to the receiving room and

that Mother Julie Angélique be requested to come to the grille.

* * *

Left alone, M. Le Varlon de Verrigny glanced about him confidently. He knew this little room well, and ordinarily he did not enter it save in dire terror. Past experiences had clothed its walls with horror and the grated window itself seemed an instrument of torture. How many times had he not stood trembling before it, harkening to Mother Julie Angélique's sermons and watching her yellow face grow yellower with wrath and disgust! How many times had Mother Julie Angélique not warned him in this very room that he was bound for the abyss and that the place he would end in was full of mud and fire! He had cowered then:—but today! Thus striding jauntily up and down the room and striking the flagging with his heels he tested out the echo to assure himself that his harangue would fall advantageously upon his sister's ears. Mother Julie Angélique would be overwhelmed when she received the unexpected and joyous tidings. And though God should be rendered all honor for the transformation, it should nevertheless gain the miraculous subject of so remarkable and unforeseen a grace, no slight consideration.

Like the great orators of the past who were his constant models, M. Le Varlon de Verrigny went straight to the heart of the matter, so that Mother Julie Angélique as soon as she appeared at the grille knew immediately what had happened. M. Le Varlon de Verrigny was thus enlarging upon the various considerations that had brought him there, when he was jerked to a sudden halt by his sister's dry voice which informed him that this cloister he desired to enter was not a stable for goats, but a fold for sheep; that one was not supposed to appear there as he was, still reeking with sin, but already purified by penitence; that the place was a gathering of pious folk, united there in God and not a motley crew of sinners; and that he must first be assured that these saintly gentlemen consented to receive in their midst someone whose very description might sicken them with revulsion and who as a guarantee of his good faith could offer no deed that might prove his sincerity. Mother Angélique thereto appended many a severe remark and brought her sermon to an end by ordering M. Le Varlon de Verrigny to remain quietly where he was, while she busied herself with discovering if there were any grounds for acceding to his request or if he should not be shipped off to those whose

business it was to bleach out a benighted soul with the ashes of repentance.

M. Le Varlon de Verrigny was stunned. He had imagined that doors would be flung open to him and that he would be greeted with loud demonstrations of joy. But here he was in a lonely, bare, cold, little room seated on a hard wooden bench and treated more like a valet applying for a position than with the pomp and ceremony he considered due to the illustrious and repentant sinner he was. However, he steeled himself to go wherever he must, and arranging himself more comfortably upon the bench he surrendered himself to meditation.

His thoughts were not uncolored by anxiety, for poor M. Le Varlon de Verrigny secretly worried about the punishments that were in store for him. His shoulders already smarted under the lash of self-mortification and his body itched under the prickles of a hair shirt. The wooden benches themselves promised nothing good. Into what dungeon would he be conducted? He pictured the straw mattress, the vent-hole, and the death's head. What would they give him to eat? Without being a gourmand he did not scorn enough to sustain him. Moreover he had begun to feel hungry and no one ap-

peared. Evidently they were arguing his case and he asked himself if it would perhaps not be for the best after all if they refused him access to this sanctified enclosure so that he might with an open heart confess his transgressions to the parish priest. On the other hand the fear of hell tortured him. He had veritably beheld the countenance of the devil glowering upon the features of the little girl and deep in his soul he felt very much inclined to reform. Still, they should help him, instead of deserting him there to cool his heels in an anteroom for the rest of the day.

Occasionally M. Le Varlon de Verrigny would rise and stride impatiently up and down the room. It was now afternoon. As this painful delay was evidently his first act of penitence and a test of his sincerity, he resolved to submit to it without protest. He stretched himself out on the wooden bench and prepared to take a nap. He would doubtless have other punishments to endure. It was wise to fortify and prepare himself for them as well as possible.

M. Le Varlon de Verrigny, being roughly shaken from sleep, heard a voice saying to him:

"Come now, Monsieur, and get up. I will show you to your room."

The person who had uttered these words and who was leaning over the prostrate body of M. Le Varlon de Verrigny, was a stockily built person with a coarse face. Deep lines wrinkled his forehead, his eyes were small and bright, his mouth large and toothless. His close-cropped hair was turning gray and his huge, hairy hands were ridged with veins. He wore a dark colored suit and wooden shoes. His appearance was both rustic and churchly, that of a farm hand and a beadle. M. Le Varlon de Verrigny contemplated him. He was doubtless a servant charged with showing him to his room and M. Le Varlon de Verrigny rose stiff and lame from the bench where he had been lying. The honest fellow upon seeing him stretch, broke into laughter.

"I' faith, Monsieur, it is all too evident that you are accustomed to a softer bed."

M. Le Varlon de Verrigny did not relish familiarities from servants and on any other occasion he would have rebuked the fellow for the impudent jest, but this good man was doubtless a holy man too and there are certain places where the most lowly, if they be devout, rank above sinners.

Upon leaving the anteroom, M. Le Varlon de Verrigny followed the stranger through a number of deserted courtyards. Finally he entered a large

garden surrounded by high walls and divided into small, square vegetable gardens. A number of fruit trees were growing there, some of them supported by espaliers. As autumn was already drawing to a close they were beginning to lose their yellowing leaves. The good man who conducted M. Le Varlon de Verrigny would occasionally stoop down to pick up a fallen apple or would pluck a late pear from a tree. His heels crunched along the gravel path. M. Le Varlon thought with a sigh of the ripe and juicy plums he had devoured with M. de Bréot in the coach when they had returned together from Verduron. Then, with a deeper sigh he recalled that green and unripe apple M. Floreau de Bercaillé had so shamefully tempted him with. M. de Bréot had doubtless already spread far and wide the news of M. Le Varlon's retirement and this thought filled him with satisfaction. Those who had learned of it must imagine him already kneeling upon the church floor or intoning psalms, when as a matter of fact he was still only passing between a few paltry vegetable plots behind a simple fellow in sabots.

Meanwhile they had arrived at a neat building which the guide asked M. Le Varlon de Verrigny to enter. They removed their shoes at the threshold

and silently walked along the tiled floor of the corridor. The simplicity of the house with its white-washed walls presented a pleasant spectacle of cleanliness. The stairway with its wooden banister led to a long corridor lined with doors of a similar shape and size. On every door was printed a name and M. Le Varlon de Verrigny read his own on the door he entered. He found himself in a small and spotlessly white room, furnished with a bed covered by a straw mattress, a chair, and a wooden table. Two covered dishes and a piece of bread rested on the table. The sight of food filled M. Le Varlon with joy, for he was famished.

"And here is something to allay your hunger, Monsieur," said the old fellow uncovering a thin soup and some stewed vegetables. "If you care to eat now I will wait until you have finished before I say what I have to say."

And after offering M. Le Varlon de Verrigny the only chair in the room he without further ceremony sat down on the edge of the bed.

M. Le Varlon de Verrigny gulped down the thin soup and then attacked the vegetables. He made a wry face upon discovering they were tasteless and ill-cooked.

"Ha ha! Monsieur, these rations do not seem to

impress you as being over-good, but you will become used to them. The poorness of the vegetables is due to the manner in which they have been prepared, for they look very appetizing in the garden. I know, because I raise them. I love to garden, Monsieur, and they are kind enough to entrust me with raising anything I wish. It is a liberty I do not deserve and were I consistent I would more profitably employ my spade by digging a hole to inter my sinful carcass in, than by cultivating the soil that it may produce food to nourish my miserable substance. For it hardly deserves preservation or to be spared from the worms that should pasture upon it. But here below one must await God's will. For this reason I secluded myself here. Before my retirement I followed the evil ways of this world and as I realized this path led me into the gravest dangers in respect to the future, I resolved to enter into that state and condition wherein you now see me. It is thus, Monsieur, that Monsieur La Bégissière has the honor of being present at your first meal here, and at your first act of penitence."

And the red face of M. de La Bégissière widened in a broad smile.

M. de La Bégissière had joined the army at the age of fifteen and had thereafter practiced no

other profession than that of taking part whenever fighting occurred. At fifty years he had performed every action that pertains to war. Though he had performed many useful and heroic deeds, he had not been innocent of evil and sinful ones and it was these that at a certain moment had filled M. de Bégissière with a desire to reform his mode of life. Visited by divine grace, he had withdrawn to Port Royal to expiate the sin of having been a man. His conversion, now already forgotten, had formerly created a great stir. M. de La Bégissière had likewise been forgotten. He led a simple, bucolic existence. At times the straight alignment of a flower bed recalled the array of troops. He wielded his spade as if he were digging a trench. The roundness of a fruit occasionally reminded him of a bomb or a bullet. The watering pot rang like a smitten breast plate, but he quickly thrust these ideas aside and returned to those more customary ones wherein the goodness of God was mingled with the cultivation of vegetables.

"Yes, Monsieur," said he to M. Le Varlon de Verrigny, as the latter solemnly masticated some leathery beans, "I have known the world all too well and I have left it never to return. Moreover I have no regrets at leaving it. Those things that

we have considered necessities soon are forgotten in the tranquillity of solitude. Do not imagine, however, that we lead a lazy and indolent life here. Far from it! Cultivating the soil in the sweat of one's brow is by no means our only duty; one must also cultivate one's soul and one's mind. One must pluck up the evil weeds; one must sow seeds of piety, water them with prayer, and thus bring forth wholesome and meritorious fruit which at the supreme hour of harvest will drop wholly ripe from the twigs of our souls into the basket of our salvation. Ah! how I long to teach you this double cultivation, for they have entrusted me with your soul during your early days here. Nevertheless, I should add that I am not to do the work single handed, for Monsieur Ravaut will aid you with his wisdom better than I can. But hold, it is he who now comes to introduce himself and to greet you."

The open door in fact gave entrance to a seedy little man with a round calotte on his head who spoke in a low voice. He bowed to M. Le Varlon de Verrigny who bowed in his turn and bent his ear to the remarks of M. Ravaut, as the latter expressed himself in a tremulous and almost inaudible voice.

"Now that you have become one of us, Monsieur, we are entirely at your disposal. God is here

for everyone, and we will be happy if we can help you to enter into divine converse with God at every moment, for such is the delight and recompense of our solitude. Time will pass quickly here if you know how to employ it as you should. Monsieur de La Bégissière has been enjoined to teach you physical labor, but I may add that such labor comes to naught without the labor of the spirit. One must alternate them, and Monsieur de La Bégissière provides an excellent example, for if he is skilled in the wielding of a spade, he does not the less excel in the wielding of a pen, for he composes little edifying fables about vegetables of which some are models of good sense and of piety."

M. de La Bégissière blushed with pleasure at the compliment, while M. Ravaut continued in an even lower tone of voice:

"As for me, Monsieur de La Bégissière has perhaps told you that I employ my time in translating and in glossing passages of Holy script and certain works of the Church Fathers. Nevertheless, I also have my manual labors. I go to the wells each day to draw water. It seems to me that this duty well becomes someone who searches for truth and who proffers it as the reflection of God. I firmly hope that you will divide your time between

manual labor and study and that, if Monsieur de La Bégissière takes charge of the one you will permit me to take charge of the other. What remains of your day, Monsieur, will belong to prayer. In that no one can aid you. God alone dispenses his mercy, which I hope he will vouchsafe you in abundance. And now, Monsieur de La Bégissière, let us leave Monsieur Le Varlon de Verrigny to his own thoughts for he doubtless has need of meditation and solitude."

Whereupon M. de La Bégissière and M. Ravaut took their leave. Alone in his room, M. Le Varlon listened to their retreating footsteps, those of M. de La Bégissière being heavy and dull, while those of M. Rauvaut were dry and light. The former had filled the room with the smell of leaves and earth, the latter with the smell of old parchment and ink.

The day did not come to a close before M. Le Varlon de Verrigny interviewed Mother Julie Angélique again. She received him in the anteroom. Though M. Le Varlon expected pious exhortations to righteousness, he received none at all. Mother Julie Angélique only desired that her brother should settle all mundane affairs. She explained the various steps he should take to this purpose and gave herself the power of executing

them. Thus M. Le Varlon de Verrigny returned to his little room only after he had delegated to his sister the administration and disposition of all his worldly possessions. Trustworthy persons were to employ his income in works of charity, he having no longer need of anything in this world except the boundless mercy of God.

M. Le Varlon de Verrigny was reflecting upon his new position in the world when a little waiting-servant entered with a tray bearing the same kind of soup and vegetables he had eaten that afternoon. M. de La Bégissière was, however, no longer there to season them with his conversation. Night had descended. A smoky candle lighted the room. M. Le Varlon de Verrigny felt ill at ease, but he fell to eating and scraped the dishes clean, for he realized that he must still sustain that miserable body to which he owed his reclusion in the backwoods of a deserted countryside. Thus seated upon a lame chair before a sputtering candle end he waited for it to plunge him into the darkness and silence of a lost, solitary room, and prey to the temptations of Satan, for Evil is also akin to Darkness and Darkness is not to be trusted by a sinner.

It was with these mournful thoughts that M. Le Varlon de Verrigny was preparing for bed when

he heard footsteps in the corridor. He pricked up his ears and recognized the hurried shuffle of M. Ravaut. M. Ravaut occupied a cell to the right of him. Another step sounded in the corridor. Heavy and dull it announced M. de La Bégissière. He knocked on the door with the heel of his sabot. M. de La Bégissière was returning from the garden where he had taken a turn or two before going to bed. He seated himself in the chair and blew into his fingers.

"My faith, Monsieur, how time does fly! Here we are with autumn already upon us. There was a heavy fog this evening and the ground is damp. Tomorrow if you care to have me, I will show you your work, for I imagine you have not come here to idle away your time. Well, my friend, a good night to you and try to sleep in peace. If Satan besets you with temptations you have only to knock on the wall. I am a light sleeper and will rise at once. I will fall to prayers to aid you in repulsing the evil spirit. If mine do not suffice, you have only to arouse M. Ravaut who sleeps in the room next to yours, and among all three of us, Monsieur, I am certain we can rout him."

M. Le Varlon de Verrigny viewed the departure of M. de La Bégissière with no little trepidation.

He wondered fearfully if Satan whose seductive forms he had fled, would appear to him under some terrifying or horrible aspect, furious at seeing a prey whom he must have counted upon, slip so unexpectedly from his claws. M. Le Varlon's candle having gone out he lay for some little time wide-eyed in bed and it required nothing less to reassure him than the silence of the house, broken only by the soldierly snores of brave M. de La Bégissière and the little hacking cough of the worthy M. Ravaut.

It is probable, as M. Le Varlon de Verrigny had announced to M. de Bréot on the evening when he had been so miraculously visited by grace, that he had been completely voided of sin, for he felt himself remarkably tranquil. Nothing interrupted him amid his various occupations during the first few days of his reclusion at Port Royal. He toiled, prayed, slept with perfect regularity. He found no need of waking either M. Ravaut or M. de La Bégissière. He rose in the morning with a willing mind and an alert body. These gentlemen, however, did not conceal the fact from him that this interlude might very well be a ruse of Satan and that he must be prepared to give the latter a lively reception should he take it into his head to tempt M. Le Varlon. It was very important, said they, to fortify

himself against such an eventuality with every aid religion could offer.

M. Le Varlon did not fail to take precautions, but he considered himself forever disencumbered of that shameful propensity whereof he had been healed so miraculously. M. Le Varlon de Verrigny realized whence this happy reformation had stemmed and he did not cease to thank God for it. The Lord had performed the heavier task, as for what followed, which consisted in preserving himself in this new life, M. Le Varlon de Verrigny was not vain enough to accept the praise for it himself. He rather believed that the sanctity of the place overawed Satan, who dared hazard nothing within its sacred walls. Thus did M. Le Varlon hold the place in the highest esteem. Nothing seemed more beautiful or nobler. He lauded its site and its buildings. Even the air one breathed seemed blessed with unparalleled virtue.

This attitude sustained him in a mood of gaity and contentment which glowed in his conversation and sparkled in his eyes. Every detail of his existence appeared pleasant and he performed his various duties with an astonishing amount of cheerfulness and good will. Nothing disgusted or wearied him, neither the mediocrity of the fare, nor the

tediousness of the services, nor the monotony of the day. M. Le Varlon de Verrigny, truly the most happy of men, existed in such a state of beatitude and joviality, that Paradise seemed to have already received him.

He was the first to awake at dawn when the boy ran through the corridor with his lantern, knocking at every door. He immediately leaped out of his bed onto the stone floor. He dressed himself without aid and with great dispatch. He owed this agility in dressing, it is true, to past encounters with women. He had often found it necessary to disrobe at no matter what hour of the day or night and to reassemble his clothes from the disorder in which he had flung them off. He thanked heaven for having turned this ability to God's own purpose and glory. He felt some consolation in realizing that his past misdemeanors had at least taught him how to draw on his hose and breeches and to button up his jerkin without the help of a valet. As to his periwig, he had renounced it. He went about with his head bare. Once dressed, he pulled on his heavy boots, and after having offered up a prayer, he began his day.

Autumn had come to a sudden end and the country was now in mid-winter. The sun rose late and

set early, but there nevertheless remained a fair amount of daylight to work in. M. Le Varlon de Verrigny under the advice and counsel of M. de La Bégissière and of M. Ravaut had arranged a program to which he conformed meticulously. Work interrupted by divine worship followed prayer. M. Le Varlon de Verrigny never failed to attend service, glowing with piety and faith, and deporting himself in the most edifying and exemplary manner. He loved to mingle his voice with that of the congregation and as his voice was powerful he recognized its defiant bravuras among the voices it joined. Thus he was persuaded that God heard him more clearly than others. The Lord, moreover, could not fail to note that M. Le Varlon de Verrigny caroled his praises and did his best to waft them to heavenly ears, though at the end of the service it often left him all hoarse and steaming with sweat that rose from his body like a new kind of incense.

It was thus still all blown with psalms and responses that he returned to the cell where M. Ravaut awaited him. M. Ravaut translated and glossed the books of Holy Scripture, but his translations were more literal than literary and his commentaries more substantial than elegant. He found M. Le Varlon de Verrigny a great help. The practice

of speaking eloquently had taught the latter the choice and use of words. With eloquence in mind, M. Le Varlon de Verrigny revised the erudite labors of M. Ravaut. He scrubbed, pruned, and polished them and thereby endued them with a charm which they hitherto had lacked. M. Ravaut was enchanted to see his texts take on so resplendent and perfect a form, while the reflections he drew therefrom appeared no longer an unwieldy and confused mass, but assumed the most admirable order. Thus did M. Ravaut and M. Le Varlon de Verrigny work together so marvelously well that M. de La Bégissière was obliged to wrench the pen from his pupil's hand to place a spade in it.

M. de La Bégissière had promised to initiate M. Le Varlon de Verrigny into the occult mysteries of gardening, but the season was hardly propitious and it was therefore necessary to await spring. In order to harden him to toil and break him into feats of muscular endurance, M. de La Bégissière led his friend to the wood, there to gather dry branches and collect faggots.

Nothing was more elevating than to see worthy M. de La Bégissière at work. Neither the snow that covered the earth, nor the frosts that stiffened it, nor even the mud that splashed over his sabots

could dampen his zeal or cool his ardor. No load was too heavy for his shoulders. M. Le Varlon de Verrigny strove with all his might to emulate him. He desired his load of faggots to be as great and as heavy as that of M. de La Bégissière. Thus they would both stagger back from the woods loaded down with kindling and often with their loads so intertwisted and entangled that they would have difficulty in separating them. M. de La Bégissière never flung down his faggots without observing that they were so much fuel carried to the ovens of purgatory, but at least it was not enough to roast their ribs when the time came to pass through its flames before taking their seats in heaven.

M. Le Varlon de Verrigny laughed merrily at these remarks, for secretly he even hoped to escape Purgatory. To that very purpose he toiled with M. Ravaut, sang in the choir, and gathered dead wood with M. de La Bégissière. To this very purpose, moreover, had he not renounced the world? Had his conversion not been entire and complete? Concerning this final triumph he was astounded at the ease with which he had struck off the fetters which had for so long trammeled him and which with a single blow he had loosened. He even asked himself how for so long he could have clung to

those false pleasures which he had so easily foregone and which he missed so very little.

He unbosomed himself one day to M. Ravaut. The little, sickly, dark man stared at him through his spectacles. The thought that M. Ravaut had ever suffered from venial desire seemed alarming in itself. He gently replied to M. Le Varlon de Verrigny:

"I have never experienced, Monsieur, a yearning toward what man chooses to call pleasure and in particular for that pleasure one pretends to find in the society of women. A thirst for their society has never troubled me. How and in what a way could I find any interest in such vain creatures, hardly one of whom knows Hebrew, Latin, or Greek and who can only express superficial thoughts in a vulgar language? I therefore hardly deserve praise for having escaped their toils and snares, but if I have not known this particular temptation, Satan has not spared me others. And doubt me not, Monsieur, when I say they were very powerful, since I was forced to find protection from them in this holy refuge."

And good M. Ravaut dipped his pen in the ink as one dips his fingers into holy water. For M. Ravaut remembered those learned discussions in

which he had given way to wrath and invective. Savants bring a special violence and bitterness to controversy for if like everyone else they believe in the truths they propound they are convinced that their particular truths are better based and better founded than those of anyone else, and inasmuch as it has required all their patience to substantiate them, they strive to enforce their truths and to defend them with an ardor that frequently leads scholars to substitute insult for argument. So one often is astonished to behold them defending the most sublime ideas with the grossest arguments and by every method of trickery and guile known to scholars.

M. de La Bégissière whom M. Le Varlon de Verrigny also questioned concerning the same matter, responded differently.

"So much the better for you, Monsieur, if Satan spares you. As for me, I still, in spite of all my gray hairs, find myself occasionally dallying with what you may well guess, and you, my friend, had best take care to fortify yourself against the fiend's return. The devouring fire of flesh is obstinate and Satan often husbands his sparks within us. Free as you may be from temptation within the sacred confines of this holy refuge, yet should you return

to the world you would perhaps hazard yourself to more temptations than you imagine."

M. Le Varlon de Verrigny shook his head and broke into laughter. The idea of returning to the world appeared ridiculous. What would he do there without a periwig and in sabots? Moreover he had never been so happy than in his present solitude. From it he derived a rare feeling of security and relief. And he could envisage no greater happiness than revising M. Ravaut's prose or carrying his faggots side by side with M. de La Bégissière.

"So much the better, my friend, so much the better," said the latter, "let us remain where we are, for we have taken an excellent resolution, believe me. It is even true that so far as I am concerned I am almost ashamed of having taken it. You will agree that we are out of harm's way here, but after all it savors of subterfuge to thus save one's skin only at the price of a few paltry sacrifices and self-denials. Would it not be nobler and braver to take our chances like other men and seek to live in God while we continue to live in the world? Let us make the best of the ramparts we have reared, but let us not place too much faith in them. Ah, my friend, let us strengthen our defenses and may our bundle of faggots tomorrow be large enough to close up

all breeches in the walls and help us to repel the assailant."

M. de La Bégissière not only used his faggot gathering and his gardening to keep his spirit watchful and vigorous, he coupled them with a number of other practices such as maceration, fasting, and other forms of self-mortification. Following his example M. Le Varlon de Verrigny decided to essay them. Now that his salvation seemed assured, other ambitions stirred within him. Instead of creeping humbly into heaven, so to speak up the back stairs, why should he not enter triumphantly through the wide flung gates? Why should he not enter at the heels of worthy M. de La Bégissière who would appear there, sabots in hand and loaded down with faggots whose withered and dead branches would bloom again with leaves greener than the palms of the blessed.

Meanwhile the news of the reclusion and penitence of M. Le Varlon de Verrigny had spread throughout Paris. Men had begun by doubting his penitence would last, but when many months went by without his reappearance, they were soon convinced that M. Le Varlon de Verrigny had retired for good. The Marquise de Preignelay asserted that M. Le Varlon was the stuff that made saints. Mme.

du Tronquoy seemed extremely proud at having received in the grotto of Verduron the last oblations of so saintly a person and she earnestly requested her ladyship to place an inscription among the shell-word, setting forth every detail of that memorable adventure whose outcome was the subject of everyone's conversation. Many illustrious persons, when the season became milder, begged permission of M. Le Varlon de Verrigny to visit him in his retreat, but he politely advised them not to put themselves to so much trouble as they would only find him a poor man busy splitting wood or strewing manure on the garden.

The garden that year promised to be the pride of worthy M. de La Bégissière and to repay him abundantly for all his pains. Fair weather offered the most favorable circumstances for a bountiful harvest of fruits and vegetables. The sky was mild and when M. Le Varlon de Verrigny betook himself to M. Ravaut's room to work there he found the window open with the pleasant odor of leaves and air mingling with the musty smell of old books. These odors had a certain benign influence on M. Ravaut for a little smile lurked in his yellow cheeks. Moreover, M. Ravaut was happy with M. Le Varlon de Verrigny. No one was more skilful than he

in giving order to his sentences or in endowing them with a high-sounding eloquence. M. Ravaut himself placed no great importance on what he considered after all mere pomp and vanity. In his erudite labors he was sensitive only to exactness of meaning and the truth of his interpretations, but he did realize that good writing aids the reader and that the public is discouraged as much by the obscurity of one's subject as by an uneven and ragged style. If it had been merely a matter of his own ideas, M. Ravaut would have been completely indifferent whether they obtained a large or small audience, but as it concerned the word of God it was important to spread it and permeate the century with it. Therefore no stone should be left unturned to achieve this purpose and the beautiful way in which M. Le Varlon de Verrigny simplified the most difficult passages and the skill with which he imbued them with sweetness and light overwhelmed M. Ravaut with admiration and pleasure. He cherished a sincere affection for M. Le Varlon de Verrigny and he almost raised thanks to heaven for that adventure which had dispatched so precious a collaborator into solitude. Moreover he wished to have M. Le Varlon continually by him and he often reproached M. de La Bégissière for

too frequently leading him away or for returning him so blown with earthly labors that sweat dripped from his forehead onto the manuscripts.

"It is not," repeated M. Ravaut, "that I in the slightest disapprove of manual labor. I do my daily share by drawing up water from the well, but once my twelve buckets have been hauled up you could not hire me to haul up a single one more, while this M. de La Bégissière would cut his prayers short rather than not water his beans or prune his pear trees."

M. de La Bégissière smiled indulgently at these remonstrances as he led M. Le Varlon de Verrigny by the sleeve to show him the progress the garden was making. M. de La Bégissière was happy and he sought to communicate his joy to M. Le Varlon de Verrigny, but for some little time the latter had displayed signs of worry and dejection. For long periods he would remain in deep abstraction, not in that abstraction of one who is praying but in that of one who meditates upon involuntary subjects. Something was certainly troubling the soul of M. Le Varlon de Verrigny. Not that he in any way gave the impression of a man whose resolutions are weakening! On the contrary he had redoubled the violence of his flagellations, or in other ways

proved himself more and more ascetic, but that satisfied good-humor which marked the first days of his entrance into solitude, that jubilance at having abandoned sin, that benignity that glowed in his large face as if it were continually turned towards the dawn of a new life, all these had entirely disappeared.

One day while working in the garden under the glare of the noonday sun, he left his spade sticking up in the soil and retired to a little bower to seek a little quietness and shade. Seated upon a bench he was lingering there dolefully mopping the sweat from his brow when he observed M. de La Bégissière coming towards him. M. de La Bégissière seemed as warm as he was. His red face glistened under his matted hair and his cheek bones gleamed with sweat. His large shirt of rough cloth open at the chest revealed the coarse outcroppings of hair that covered it. For the sake of coolness he had removed his sabots and trod the soil with bare feet. In each hand he grasped a watering pot which from time to time he clanked together with a warlike sound. Coming up to M. Le Varlon de Verrigny he sat down beside him on the bench and began removing a large thorn from his heel. The gloom of his friend worried worthy M. de La Bégis-

sière and though he would have liked to pluck out the thorn that rankled in his friend's soul, even as he had just plucked from his own flesh the thorn that had lodged there, he did not understand how he should do it. Thus he began by coughing several times to attract the attention of M. Le Varlon de Verrigny, but as the latter continued in his state of taciturnity, he nudged him with his elbow.

"My word, Monsieur," he remarked to start the conversation, "I do consider this the most remarkable weather and our garden promises to be the finest in all the land. May God be blessed for having so generously received the labor of our hands. He recompenses our efforts and it is a sign that our labors are acceptable. I feel entirely recomforted. One thing alone bothers me. It is that you do not seem so happy as I, for your face reveals a sadness and discouragement which are really not part of your character and which must be caused by something very special. Though I do not desire to question you concerning them, I should be most happy to be of use to you if it is within my power."

At these remarks M. Le Varlon de Verrigny uttered a long sigh and his friend proceeded.

"Your dejection causes me no little anxiety and I

frequently wonder what causes it. The life we lead here, as outwardly simple as a life can be, often conceals the darkest secret. The attempt to live in God does not bear fruit until we have plucked out the weeds within our hearts, and the thought has occurred to me that you are passing through one of those periods of doubt that are so painful. That is the reason I have considered asking you in all frankness to confide to me what disturbs or troubles you."

M. Le Varlon de Verrigny turned toward M. de La Bégissière.

"It may be," continued the latter, "that my request appears bold, or indeed importunate, and I would certainly not be astonished if you considered it such. Do we not have many wise folk here who excel in the guidance of one's soul and know better than anyone what it needs? Our spiritual pastors and masters are admirable. Through religion they understand the reason and end of all things and they draw conclusions from its dogmas and its axioms. Though it may be presumptuous of a poor gardener like me to assume their duties, nevertheless their sanctity and their remoteness from life persuades me to offer you my humble advice. The sin which led you here is hardly known to them

except by hearsay, while I have had the misfortune of committing it frequently enough to enable me, if not to offer you good advice, at least to sympathize with your temptations and struggles, for it is doubtless some disturbance of this nature which has given rise to your disquietude."

M. de La Bégissière paused. He scratched the place on his calloused heel whence he had just plucked the thorn. M. Le Varlon de Verrigny, after sighing more deeply than before, turned to M. de La Bégissière.

"Alas, Monsieur, since you have questioned me I will conceal nothing of my state of mind and by describing it I may receive some little consolation. In me you behold a man who has tried to do his best, but who has not found that best so good as one would have believed, or so good as he himself hoped. It is a miserable sinner who speaks to you and one who is about to relate the strangest relapse you have ever heard. Ah, Monsieur. . . . "

M. de La Bégissière let go of his heel and placed his hand behind his ear, for he was a little deaf. M. Le Varlon began his story with these words:

"God, Monsieur, brings us forth into the world as he wills and we have no reason to reproach him for whatever it pleases him to make of us. But it

often happens that he endows us with many diverse instincts which combat and countercheck each other, so for a long time we remain uncertain of ourselves and ignorant of our true nature. As for me it has not been like this. From as far back as I can remember I have had an appetite for women and this appetite made itself manifest at so early an age that it is quite probable I was born with it. The first signs I gave of this disastrous passion were so violent and so obstinate that it doubtless had originated long before the signs whereby I revealed its power. Finally, Monsieur, to make a long story short, I will simply observe that from the day this deplorable tendency was announced, it did not cease to extend its empire and its sway, and to such an extent that during my life I was so entirely enslaved by it that I was constantly led into the most shameful and sinful conduct. Women, Monsieur, were then my sole preoccupation, and the shame of comporting oneself with them after the dictates of nature became my besetting sin, a sin into which I fell with a regularity and a lack of resistance that nothing could overcome.

"I will not describe all my transgressions, nor paint a picture of the sinner I used to be. The sight of women threw me into complete disorder. More-

over, to my great unhappiness, it was not necessary that they be beautiful. I could satisfy myself anywhere and with anything. Ah! most fortunate are those sensitive souls who demand physical perfection. For is that not itself a marvelous protection? But how little a true sinner really requires! I asked only standing room for my sin, and is it not true, Monsieur, that every woman affords it?"

Worthy M. de La Bégissière nodded his head at this truth and M. Le Varlon de Verrigny continued his oration.

"Yes, Monsieur, I was exactly as I have described myself, but beyond that I was a virtuous man. I do not say this through vanity, but to prove to you that fundamentally my character was not evil. Except in what pertained to this sin of the flesh, I comported myself properly in everything. The salutary idea of my turpitude estranged me from Pride. When I was praised for my good figure or my capacity in business, I harbored in my mind something to keep me humble in my own eyes. It was sufficient for me to remember the beast that lurked within me. I did not see that M. Le Varlon de Verrigny whom I heard praised, but I perceived another man who, upon leaving the salon or court would assume strange postures. Man, Monsieur, is

neither beautiful nor sublime when he takes his pleasure with women. The posture of love making is neither noble nor imposing and Nature demands, when we wish to satisfy that instinct she has planted in our loins, those motions which though they give our bodies an interior pleasure have no outward or apparent grace. In fact they transform the most gallant cavalier and the most perfect mount into a monstrous beast which mythology would have placed beside its centaurs.

"If I was not proud, neither was I avaricious. A fondness for women accustoms one to spending his money freely and one does not hesitate to pay what their welcome demands. I also owe to them the fact that I was no gourmand. The exercise of love making aroused my appetite and I preferred food that restored my strength than dainty morsels that tickled my palate. Thus, Monsieur, it is evident that my besetting sin exempted me from the majority of the others. Their power was eclipsed by its power and I was led to believe, as you will agree, that if I ever succeeded in destroying the irresistible impulse which drove me to carnal works I would, in the twinkling of an eye, become a Christian and no worse a one than the next man and as equally capable of reaching heaven."

M. Le Varlon de Verrigny paused for a moment before continuing.

"A circumstance that I will not describe, but which you doubtless have heard of . . . that sin, which I believed insurmountable, suddenly lost its mortal attraction for me. I took advantage of its disappearance and hastened into retreat. You saw me entering here, in fact it was even you who awoke me on the bench of the anteroom where I was dozing, still completely stunned and dumbfounded by the sudden visitation of unexpected grace. You then warned me to be watchful for the return of the old Adam. I expected that he would display some sign of reawakening, but he did not appear. Ah, Monsieur, what was my joy! It was the joy of someone who believes himself saved and who, if he has still to efface the sins of the past, is nevertheless certain of his future."

M. Le Varlon de Verrigny had risen and stood facing M. de La Bégissière.

"The beast is dead, Monsieur," he cried, "the beast is dead, and I drag behind me its lifeless pelt. And were you, Monsieur, a naked woman rather than a venerable old man I would not experience the slightest promptings of desire toward you!"

Worthy M. de La Bégissière, startled at the idea

of being a naked woman, modestly drew his shirt over his shaggy chest, as M. Le Varlon de Verrigny, lowering his voice, continued.

"But meanwhile, Monsieur, sin continues to possess me. Though it no longer raises its carnal head, it creeps, it breeds, it swarms in my body. It overruns me, it gnaws me, it stings. No longer does it lodge in one place, but it occupies the whole extent of my soul."

And M. Le Varlon de Verrigny's features assumed an expression of revulsion as of someone who feels an invisible army of vermin swarming over him.

"Yes, Monsieur, such is my lamentable condition. Though I am no longer lustful, I am in revenge, gluttonous, slothful, avaricious. In place of a single and unique sin, here I am with I do not know how many, all tormenting and obsessing me in every way. Not as of old, Monsieur, do they make those sudden assaults that plunged me headlong into lust and which, once the storm had vented its fury, left me a good man, a little abashed and discomforted by what had happened to him. But now, on the contrary, these new arrivals have slipped within me secretly; little by little they have mastered my thoughts and have taken possession of my solitude. They have become my intimate compan-

ions who never leave me, whom nothing can distract, and who will lodge within me at their ease as they have no reason to depart and no outlet through which I can rid myself of their pricks and stings."

M. Le Varlon de Verrigny suddenly stepped forward and seized M. de La Bégissière by the shoulders.

"Answer me, Monsieur, is not my condition miserable and ridiculous? In me you behold a sluggard who labors, who spades the soil, binds faggots, or scribbles on paper. You behold a gourmand who eats stewed vegetables and drinks water from a pitcher; a vainglorious sinner who has no other witness of his glory than himself; a miser who no longer can use his wealth and who has not a sou in his pocket. Yet I am the very man I describe and these are the strange masters who possess my soul. This is what I have found here, Monsieur, and the man who stands before you."

And M. Le Varlon de Verrigny, blushing with shame and with anger, dropped heavily upon the bench beside M. de La Bégissière.

"Ah! Monsieur, why did God uproot me from the world to lead me hither? What I first considered the result of divine grace I can now more truly de-

scribe as a trick of heavenly rancor. Oh that I had clung to my old, unique sin! But as opportunities to commit this sin do not continually arise, these new ones on the other hand beset me at every moment and I have all the solitude of the day and all the silent length of the night to think upon them."

And M. Le Varlon de Verrigny hid his face in his hands as if crushed by despair. M. de La Bégissière had ceased to scratch his heel.

"I have promised, Monsieur, to offer you my slight advice and I desire less even than before to fail in my promise. To speak the truth I do not believe that you were made for this place. Those who repair here are folk who wish to attain heaven by an act that will assure it and who sacrifice themselves completely to that end, but I fear you have not sufficient strength to play the game. Though you have high cards in your hand who can be certain that you will not lose your stake? Even if you left your knapsack at the door when you entered here you have nevertheless guarded a few crumbs in your coat lining, which in spite of yourself nourish your imagination. I do not suggest that this is your fault, but these crumbs are sufficient to fatten the cancer that is eating your heart and which can

only be healed in a manner that I will now attempt to describe. Were I in your place, Monsieur, I would return to the world, free to resurrect the former man you abandoned there. He is perhaps worth quite as much as the man who slipped into his shoes and whose purposes you will not succeed in achieving, for the yearnings you have turned up in your heart possess a vivacity that nothing can repress. They are too greatly in the strength of their newly fledged power to allow you any chance of putting an end to them in a solitude whose blessings they render useless.

"Return to the world, Monsieur, but do not thereby despair of your salvation. There are always lucky windfalls and who knows if, between two onslaughts of your besetting sin, you might not find time for one of those little acts of penitence which permit us to properly present ourselves before God, should he be pleased to call us during one of those moments? I realize that you have dreamed of assuming another role on high than that of stealing up the back stairs, but believe an old soldier when he says that it is something even to reach heaven, though one enters there not by the breech, but in a sack of flour or in a bale of hay."

And the worthy M. de La Bégissière placed his

two bare feet on the ground and left M. Le Varlon de Verrigny staring at the garden wall and at the little green door that led to the great world outside and at the key from which a spider swinging at the end of its thread like a pendulum, marked the hours with its deformed and delicate body.

CHAPTER NINE

IN WHICH MONSIEUR DE BRÉOT
PURCHASES A SUIT OF GREEN VELVET AND AGAIN
BEHOLDS MADAME DE BLIONNE

MORE than a year had passed since M. de Bréot had come to Paris, not so much to seek his fortune, for his had always satisfied him, but rather to expose himself to chance in that place where one is granted its most surprising turns. There is nothing like expecting everything to persuade one that what happens is unremarkable, and when M. de Bréot reviewed the various events that took place during his sojourn in a city notorious for its great variety of adventures, he could not but confess that so far as he was concerned he had been witness to only the most humdrum and everyday occurrences, not one of which had been capable of transforming him into a new being. M. de Bréot was still M. de Bréot to himself as well as to other people. He still believed the same things he had believed before he entered the city. It is true, however, that there mingled in his thoughts the memory

of a few strange and fantastic people who after all had made it well worth his trouble of leaving his province.

Among these characters the first who rose to his mind was M. Floreau de Bercaillé. M. de Bréot reviewed the details of their first meeting: the arbor where the April breeze rustled in the young leaves, the glint of wine in the glasses, the little table and even the face of M. Floreau de Bercaillé with its bushy eyebrows jointed at the base of his large nose, his red hair, his wall-eyes, and his huge, bacchic and eloquent mouth. The memories of M. de Bréot always began at that vine-covered tavern near the bridge of Valvins. They did not remain there, but followed M. de Bercaillé from tavern to tavern where M. Bréot admired him amid clouds of tobacco smoke and the uproar of blasphemies. Then from out of this smoke and revelry another Bercaillé would arise, a Bercaillé with a long, sour face and downcast eyes, a convert from Libertinism to Religion and smelling of holy water and sacristies.

If M. de Bréot had experienced some surprise at the conversion of M. de Bercaillé it had surprised him more to witness M. Le Varlon de Verrigny's return to God. Ah, the sublime road that led from the

grotto of Verduron and the attic room of little Annette Courboin, to the sanctified solitude of Port Royal! These thoughts naturally led M. de Bréot to the Marquise de Preignelay. M. Herbou the Contractor at once rose to his memory with that strange and mournful tale of the Duchess de Grigny and the Seven Cardinal Sins. He seemed to hear the sharp, sweet flute of Master Pucelard's little pupil, but this in turn led him swiftly to thoughts of the Silver Lyre where reigned the fair Marguerite Géraud. How her lithe, fresh body perfumed the sheets with the wholesome odor of youth. And M. de Bréot closed his eyes and surrendered to revery. Little by little the darkness beneath his eyelids became filled with light. Gleams of distant torches and candles shone there and as they neared they formed a row of twinkling footlights behind which rose arches of verdure through which a troup of leaping and gamboling Fauns entered. Their long wigs hung down over their rustic costumes of green velvet. Suddenly there was a pause and M. de Bréot believed he distinguished the sound of rustling leaves that was insensibly transformed into murmuring water. He felt a delicious coolness spread through his body as a vague form like a wraith of uncertain mist little by little took on

human aspect and gradually assumed the more distinct figure of a woman. She was clothed in a robe of silver that seemed to pour over her like a moving wave and M. de Bréot, breathless and enchanted, beheld Mme. de Blionne dance again as she had danced that evening at Verduron as the Nymph of the Fountains.

It was at the close of this reawakened dream that M. de Bréot lamented that some strange accident, some sudden turn of fate had not raised him above the crowd, for he regretted being so inconsequential a person. But how would success have aided him? Would he have been more capable of approaching Mme. de Blionne? For the general admiration her dancing had aroused and the extreme praises rendered to her gracefulness and beauty, had so excited the jealousy of her husband that ever since then he had remained with her at one of his estates where he held her in strict retirement, permitting her no other company save his own.

But the strangest thing was that M. de Blionne, as fat as he was narrow-minded, had married his wife less than two years before, less for herself than for her family connections. But it was first necessary for him to overhear various praises of his wife's virtues before he became aware of the treasure he

unintentionally had won and with whom he satisfied the demands of nature without thinking very much about her. But no sooner had this gentleman realized the value of his possession which he had until then almost scorned, than he suddenly displayed, not that esteem in which he should have always held her, but rather the most brutal and ferocious jealousy. The immediate result of this attitude was the screening of Mme. de Blionne from all admiring eyes. But even with his wife restricted to only his society, suspicion did not disturb him the less. However, if life in the country did not quiet his mind, it had at least aroused certain tastes the city had dulled. By this I mean a taste for hunting. So dominating did this passion become that he spent a large part of his time with his hounds and grooms galloping over hill and dale after game. While he thus beat the field and wood, Mme. de Blionne remained quietly at home. As she was gentleness itself, she did not complain of this treatment. The letters she dispatched to her mother or to the Marquise de Preignelay contained no lamentations. The only cause she found for reproaching her husband was that he had her comings and goings spied upon by an hireling who would quite naturally believe that such a precaution arose not from any imagin-

ary jealousy on the part of M. de Blionne, but from some real reason that she had given him.

M. de Bréot had learned all about Mme. de Blionne from public gossip. The thought that he would never again see her was unbearable to him. He began to hold his sojourn at Paris in disgust. Entertainments seemed insipid, the theater lacking in all interest. He gradually began thinking of a return to his province. He owned a house there with a little garden enlivened by a brook sufficiently large for him to make a fountain of it. He well knew to whom he would dedicate this fountain, and he would sit before it for the rest of his days, playing his lute and dreaming of memories.

These melancholy thoughts of solitude preyed more and more insistently upon his mind until he finally resolved to put his plans in operation. He decided to leave without bidding anyone farewell. M. de Bercaillé was at his hermitage. M. Le Varlon de Verrigny purged himself at Port Royal. M. Herbou, the Contractor, was at Verduron visiting the Marquise de Preignelay. There thus remained nothing for him to do but to pack his trunks. On the eve of his departure he placed his lute in its leather case and for the last time went to the shop of fair Marguerite Géraud to purchase some strings. She

sold them to him with no more attention than if she had never before seen him at her counter.

Returning to his rooms, M. de Bréot crossed the garden where the year before little Annette Courboin had listened to his lute. Her father and mother were at the moment examining a bundle of old clothes. There were all kinds, some merely rags, others in good condition. Gammer Courboin was unpacking them. At the moment M. de Bréot passed, Papa Courboin drew a bizarre looking object from the pile which at once caught the attention of M. de Bréot. It was a huge bushy wig surmounted by two golden horns. At the same time Gammer Courboin drew fourth a suit of green velvet of a bygone pattern. M. de Bréot started with surprise. How had this Faun's costume fallen into the claws of the Courboins? Did it come from M. de Tronquoy or from M. de Gaillardin or from some other Faun of Verduron? This horned wig and green suit certainly belonged to one of them, and in his mind's eye M. de Bréot once more beheld the familiar, dancing vision of the lovely Mme. de Blionne. He asked the startled Courboins how much they would take for these trappings, paid them, and ascended to his rooms. There he packed away the wig and the suit with his own belongings

and staring at the floor, he let evening descend. He departed the next day.

The valet who accompanied M. de Bréot and who had noted his downcast air was amazed during the second day of their journey when he suddenly beheld his master's drooping spirits unexpectedly rise. For M. de Bréot without warning suddenly broke into full-throated song, meanwhile slapping his horse's neck as if to urge the beast into a quicker pace. But the valet's astonishment reached dizzy heights when as they arrived at the crossroads where the road to the left led them whither they were bound, he saw his master glance toward him slily and take the road to the right. M. de Bréot listened attentively to the protests his valet raised, but instead of replying he drove his spurs into his steed's belly and galloped forward at such a clip that the protesting voice of his servant was soon left far behind. The valet was forced to press on so rapidly that instead of sleeping at Rutigny, the two travelers slept at Vargelles. They departed from this town at so early an hour that they reached Vaurieux before nightfall and Corventon before the next, where they dismounted at the Sign of the Golden Fox.

Corventon is a neat little town, as they observed

while passing through it on their way to the inn which stood at the end of a steep though well-paved street. When their mounts had been stabled, M. de Bréot called for supper. Contrary to his custom of the preceding days, M. de Bréot asked to be served in the tap room and ordered the innkeeper to bring up a bottle of his best wine. When he had finished eating and had satisfied his thirst, he inquired of his host if the neighborhood did not offer some curiosity that was worth seeing. The good man, responding to the questions of M. de Bréot continually crumpled his cap between his hands and nodded his head toward a fellow seated near the fireplace who seemed to listen with great interest to what M. de Bréot asked. At a sign from the innkeeper he came over to the table, very eager to join in the conversation.

When the newcomer had bowed to M. de Bréot and the host had repeated the traveler's question to him, he without further ado drew up a stool and pouring himself the dregs from the wine bottle, tossed off the drink with such evident relish that M. de Bréot ordered another bottle on the spot. While it was being uncorked the fellow addressed a multitude of compliments to the young man on the wonderful pleasure it was to meet a gentleman

of such noble bearing and such evident intelligence in so out of the way a place as that of Corventon. Many people traveled for amusement, said he, but very few for instruction, and it was a rare thing indeed that anyone during his travels interested himself in those curiosities that one was afforded the opportunity of seeing.

"I very much doubt, Monsieur, that you will remain here long, unless some business detains you, for nothing is more ordinary and flat than this God-forsaken section of France. The country is almost wild and presents nothing remarkable. It is partially covered by vast forests. The cleared land is, I admit, fertile, but the small extent of it reveals the lazy habits of the natives. As for the town, the best thing it contains is this tavern, which is an excellent one as you can judge for yourself. The food here is of such perfection, Monsieur, that I come here to recuperate from my work at the Château, where I have the honor of living and which appertains, as I do myself, to his grace the Count. For though his grace is a very great noble, and his house a most magnificent mansion, it is nevertheless a fact that game and venison occupy so dominant a position on the bill of fare that I have developed a certain repugnance for them, a

repugnance I from time to time attempt to remedy here by food, which if not more delicious, is at least more palatable to my special and particular taste."

The stranger watered this long sentence with a longer draught of wine and continued.

"Its cellar, also, Monsieur, deserves some praise and I frequently have recourse to it. Do not conclude thereby that the cellars of the château are not abundantly stocked with all manner of wine, but his grace is very careful about the key, not through selfishness, but through what he pretends to be reason. He believes that liquor divine has no good effect upon the intellect, that it impairs one's vision and one's hearing. He has therefore forbidden me its use, for he holds it extremely important that I keep my eyes open to everything and everybody and that I know in every detail what takes place in his home. Such is, Monsieur, the attitude of his grace in these matters and you can have it for what it is worth."

M. de Bréot listened politely to the stranger's conversation, taking care that his glass did not remain empty long. M. de Bréot frequently raised his own glass to his lips. He seemed interested in what the stranger said and finally asked him inno-

cently what was the name of this count whom he so often referred to.

"He is rightfully, Monsieur, as I have already said, a very great noble and I will add that his name is the Count de Blionne. Tomorrow when you leave Corventon you will see the château he lives in and where also resides this, your most humble servant, for if I can, Monsieur, do anything for you I would do it with the greatest good will. My profession is to render service and my natural inclination leads me to gratify every pleasure and whim of my fellow beings."

At the name of M. de Blionne, M. de Bréot started inwardly but he restrained himself and merely thanked the stranger for his friendly offer, at the same time expressing regret for having no occasion to use it, as urgent business called him to Hercinières and he intended to take the road early the next morning. The fellow manifested great sorrow at this brief sojourn. Whether the wine was very powerful, or whether the little usage he ordinarily made of it had undermined his ability to remain sober, it at any rate led him to confide much personal information to M. de Bréot. He apprized the latter, in the course of his confidences, that he was twice a widower; that his first wife being

comely had filled him with sorrow at losing her so soon, while the second of a most crabbed disposition had filled him with pleasure at not dying too late; and finally that his name was Hussonnois and that he was a police spy.

"Yes, Monsieur," he continued, "such is indeed my profession and I am delighted to see you display no sign of ill-humor at learning it. Many people evince an unfriendly attitude toward members of my craft and I must add that the scorn and contempt in which they hold us arises from false logic. After all, what reason has anyone for condemning us? Of prying into the affairs of others? I at once reply that this inquisitiveness does not distinguish us alone. The vast majority of human beings do scarcely anything except through curiosity or solicitude. Priests themselves have no other care than this. It is thus no valid cause of complaint. Moreover if we should employ our talents to our own purposes which we now employ in behalf of others, mankind could not find sufficient words to praise us. They would not cease to extol our cleverness and our resourcefulness, though when we place our gifts at the disposition of our fellow mortals, it unjustly degrades us in everyone's eyes. However, Monsieur, who can honestly deny our usefulness

here below? Is it our fault that the wickedness of men renders us indispensable? Is it right, or just, or fair that we should be condemned for the use we make of it? Should this fact not assure us an esteem that we are most unreasonably denied? Should not our merits be highly rewarded, for is it not something to penetrate the secret conduct of everyone and by cleverly unravelling the tangled threads of intrigue to weave them into a hangman's noose for a thief's neck?"

M. Hussonnois smiled bitterly and tossed off another bumper.

"Ah! Monsieur," he continued, "my blood boils when I realize the social position we hold and the one we deserve. I will, however, content myself with making one more point that you may fully understand the gross injustice to which we are submitted. I beg you simply to consider, Monsieur, in what esteem priests and particularly confessors are held. What an inestimable value is placed on their wisdom and their knowledge. They are considered the true physicians of human nature. They boast a knowledge of every element that composes it and to be privy to every detail of its innermost secrets. What a fine business it is, forsooth, but is there any reason for making so much of them? These

gentlemen would needs be very stupid not to use what reaches their ears for they are put to no other trouble in their researches than of keeping those big ears of theirs wide open. For is not everyone consumed with a desire to whisper explanations of the reason for desire and the cause of their passion? Everything is confessed to them from the blackest villainy to the pinkest sin. From man himself they learn about him in all his minutiae. Everything he plans or undertakes is revealed to them, even in the darkest of his machinations. Furthermore, Monsieur, you can see how understandable this trust in them is, if you will but consider that for all the evil that is confessed them these gentlemen are empowered with God's pardon, while that which we discover brings men to justice and that the space that separates us two is that which separates the Cross from the Gibbet."

M. Hussonnois paused a moment to take a drink, then placing his empty glass on the table he continued his interrupted discourse.

"Both of us in the end achieve the same results, but ours is of greater worth. It is not for us to sit many hours a day in a confessional to learn about everything and everybody. Our success costs us a thousand pains, efforts and often the gravest per-

sonal danger. We must use every means; the most extravagant as well as the simplest must be known and practiced. We have recourse to innumerable subterfuges and tricks, of which some, Monsieur, are more often than not most admirable. But rather than render us the honor due, people do not fail to treat us like dirt and of calling upon us only in the most extreme need."

Bottle by bottle, M. de Bréot learned all manner of interesting things from M. Hussonnois and all the principal exploits of his illustrious career; a career which was ending most poorly, as M. Hussonnois remarked, in the employ of the Count de Blionne.

"He is not a bad fellow," sighed M. Hussonnois, "and I am not ashamed of being in his service, even though he demands no deed worthy of one who has proved himself equal to the most difficult cases. In his employ I am not required to perform work in which I can fully extend myself and my talents, but after all one must occasionally take a vacation and the leisure I have found here has refreshed both my body and my mind. Meanwhile I hope, Monsieur, to sally forth on larger undertakings later on, unless leisure has blunted that *finesse* which is indispensable to my profession and whose edge must

be constantly whetted by practice. But here, Monsieur, I have even less work to do than good Monsieur de Blionne imagines."

M. Hussonnois paused a moment and leaning toward M. de Bréot whispered confidentially as he winked an eye and clucked his tongue:

"His wife is pretty, Monsieur!"

M. de Bréot was on the point of assaulting M. Hussonnois with an empty bottle, but he controlled himself.

"Have you observed," continued M. Hussonnois, "that a flirtatious wife is enough to make a man live with her in the most extreme seclusion? Well, this good Monsieur de Blionne trembles with fear at being made cuckold, and the strange thing about it is that his wife is of the soundest and most proven virtue. Since it has been my business to follow and watch her I have not once observed in her conduct the slightest hint that she wishes to swerve from virtue in the tiniest degree. Madame de Blionne, Monsieur, is chaste, even-tempered, and decorous. She accepts the most rigorous solitude, with no sign of that ill-humor which so commonly attacks women in the midst of society and which often follows them into retirement. Nevertheless, Monsieur, there is not a precaution his grace does not employ. I

have repeated my convictions to him. He displayed great satisfaction at hearing them, but his jealousy showed no sign of abating. He ordered me not to slacken my watchfulness, to continue carefully observing the approaches to the château, and to inquire about all strangers passing through the town. He fears the attempts of some adventurous and enterprising gallant for he believes the beauty of his wife must have left so powerful an impression in Paris that some lover, made desperate by her absence, might make attempts upon her virtue, or at least succeed in giving some proof of his love. So, Monsieur, instead of guzzling this rare wine with you and speaking with an open heart, I should on the contrary adroitly inform myself as to your intentions and assure myself that you are not one of those gallants who terrify his grace above everything, and from whom it is my mission in life to preserve the Countess by penetrating their schemes and baffling their projects."

M. de Bréot broke into laughter at these last remarks of M. Hussonnois, whose words were beginning to stick in his throat or issued therefrom sprinkled with frequent hiccoughs. The large quantity of wine that he had consumed glowed in his cheeks and shone in his blinking eyes. M. Husson-

nois after divers other remarks which proved that his mind was entirely befuddled, returned to the subject of M. de Blionne.

"He has only one real vice, Monsieur, but it is a black one. It concerns his wine cellar which I mentioned a moment ago. On this subject he obstinately refuses to listen to reason. Ha ha! Monsieur, what would he say if he could see me now. His confidence in me would be shattered. However, tomorrow he goes ahunting and will be away all day long. . . . Keep your eyes open, Hussonnois, my friend! . . . Bah! The Countess will be content. When his grace is not there she wanders in the gardens. I'faith, Monsieur, I let her be and take good care not to bother her. Women occasionally get strange ideas into their heads when they are alone . . . and this old devil of a Hussonnois is no worse looking than the next fellow. Hussonnois my friend, open your eyes! Every woman, Monsieur, every blessed one of them. Hehehe! Come young man, to the health of Mad. . . .

If M. de Bréot did not shatter his glass upon the head of M. Hussonnois it was because the latter's head dropped heavily all of its own accord among the bottles on the table. M. Hussonnois indeed, was completely drunk. M. de Bréot and the innkeeper

tried in vain to set him on his feet, but he flopped to one side or the other like a loose bag of grain and they had to carry him off to bed where M. de Bréot left him loudly snoring, while he himself retired to his own room that he might be up the next day at dawn.

M. de Bréot had begun to stir beneath his bedclothes when he was shaken out of the remnants of sleep by a great uproar of dogs and snapping whips. He ran with bare feet to the window that gave onto the main street of Corventon and whose pavement dawn was beginning to whiten. The hunting equipage of the Count de Blionne was the cause of this matutinal disturbance. Hounds under the upraised whips of the grooms, tugged at their leashes. Of his grace, M. de Bréot saw only his broad back and the rump of his great dappled horse which he rode solidly. Neither the yelping of the pack nor the clatter of horses' hoofs had, however, succeeded in awakening M. Hussonnois, as M. de Bréot noted later when he entered the sleeper's room. The drunkard was still snoring, but his professional watchfulness doubtless still remained with him for M. Hussonnois stirred and opened an eye. The stupor disappeared from his crimson and congested face and M. de Bréot was greatly astonished to hear

him say in a sodden, though fairly distinct voice:

"Ah, so it is you, Monsieur, and what do you say to this? Here you behold the effects of the water his grace forces me to swill. Four or five miserable bottles of wine are enough to give me the appearance I must have at present. In the old days it was never like this for I derived a marvelous lucidity from wine. When anyone confided some matter of importance to me I at once hastened to the tavern to deliberate upon it. I had as many bottles placed upon the table as there were people involved in the matter, and once they were emptied, it seemed to me that the substance of all my opponents' thoughts had entered into my head and I had only, Monsieur, to conduct myself accordingly."

And M. Hussonnois' face spread in a broad grin and his head fell sleepily back on the pillow.

Before departing, M. de Bréot commended M. Hussonnois to the innkeeper's care.

"Have no fear, Monsieur, it is not the first time that we have kept M. Hussonnois here in a similar condition. He will need a part of the day to clear his head, after which he will be as fresh as a daisy. All the same, Monsieur Hussonnois is a fine fellow. Always jolly, always polite, and always ready for his little joke. You may be sure that when he comes

here for a drink or two he is careful to put a stuffed dummy that closely resembles him in his bed. Then should the Count not seeing his Hussonnois about, take it into his head to go upstairs to find him, he would think his Hussonnois was fast asleep. More than once has the Count closed the door and tiptoed away in order not to disturb so faithful a servant whose sleep was caused by the fatigue acquired in his mater's service."

If M. de Bréot had heard all the praises the innkeeper raised to the virtues of M. Hussonnois, he would have remained with one foot in the stirrup until setting sun, but he cut them short by swinging into the saddle and bidding his host farewell. His valet also clambered astride his nag and the two travelers disappeared at the end of the main street of Corventon which led them into open country. They trotted along till they came to a little wood that lay about half a league from town at the foot of a hill.

When they had arrived there, M. de Bréot turned his horse into a thicket. Upon reaching a small clearing, he ordered his valet to hitch the horses to the trunk of a tree and to wait for him there until evening. If by nightfall M. de Bréot had not reappeared, his man had orders not to worry and to

go where he wished, charged with the delivery of a letter to M. de Bréot's cousin. Having given these orders M. de Bréot placed a large and carefully wrapped package in his portmanteau and without further explanation disappeared through the branches which he pushed to either side as he made his way through them.

It was a little after two o'clock in the afternoon when Mme. de Blionne decided to leave her room and to descend to the gardens, attracted to them by one of those days when fall comes to an end with charming gentleness. Summer seemed to have reappeared, cloaked in a certain melancholy which added a new and more delicate grace to its return. The sun was still warm and the trees mingled with their last green leaves those diverse colors that transformed them into beings of impalpable grandeur. Mme. de Blionne loved days like these. The murmur of running water and the rustle of foliage composed a sweet and stirring music in the silence of the gardens. Mme. de Blionne at first wandered along the garden beds that decorated the terrace of the château. Occasionally she would straighten the stem of a flower, at other times she would hurry as if impatient to reach some turn in the path, where she would pause a moment irresolute. She

wore a mask of black velvet to protect her skin. Her beautiful gloved hands gathered the last roses whose languid petals would sometimes flutter to the sandy path.

The terrace where Mme. de Blionne strolled was walled by a balustrade of stone. Mme. de Blionne leaned over it, resting her elbows upon the rail. She gazed down upon a large mirror of still water from which three paths rayed out as from the hub of a wheel. They were lined with beautiful trees, while those leading to the left and right were set off at equal intervals by little water gods supporting basins which flooded them with continual waves of water. The path in the center, hedged at either side by a double row of boxwood, terminated in a semi-circular opening that was divided into arcades, and with pillars rising along the edge of a pool at whose center spurted a jet of water that fell in bursts of iridescent rain. A number of benches had been placed near the pool that the pleasant spectacle might be enjoyed entirely at one's ease.

It was on one of these benches that Mme. de Blionne loved to linger. Her thoughts were not always happy for she did not derive as much pleasure in thinking about herself as women generally do.

The fate into which her loveliness had flung her, filled her with sadness. She felt a certain rancor toward it for having led her husband to such outlandish extremes. She passed on to other subjects of revery. There were those dreams that seemed to clothe her features with sorrow, and she remained seated on the bench listening to the sound of water and the rustling leaves that had commenced falling and were strewing the ground with their little golden masks, as if they had slipped from the face of autumn.

That afternoon as she let her eyes follow a few leaves that fluttered slowly downward as if suspended in the transparent air, she thought she heard a slight crackle of trodden leaves on the other side of the boxwood hedge behind her. At the same moment a few birds flew from the ground to a nearby tree. Who had thus disturbed them? Mme. de Blionne listened. Nothing more troubled the silence. . . . Two soaring leaves descended and dropped to the surface of the pool. Mme. de Blionne considered them a moment, then raised her eyes to glance about her. A cry rose to her lips, but astonishment at what she beheld prevented her from uttering it.

A head was thrust through a narrow opening of

the boxwood hedge. Long, curly hair framed a strange face that was surmounted by two golden horns. Suddenly the branches were thrust aside and Mme. de Blionne beheld the entire figure of the silvan intruder. He was dressed in a suit of green velvet, but his feet were not cloven, neither were they concealed in fine buskins. The Faun held out his arm to her, but when Mme. de Blionne seemed on the point of flight, the Wood God instead of leaping upon his prey, dropped to one knee and Mme. de Blionne heard calm and earnest words issue from his mouth.

"Fly not, lovely charmer," said he, "and do not so cruelly rebuke my presence in these gardens. Have not our kind always haunted the woods and forests? Our appearance, wild as it may be, offers nothing terrifying to one's eyes. Our purpose is not to injure and mythology has falsely described us as malign. If that were true in olden days, time has corrected it and the age we live in now has, even in the depths of our retreats, imbued us with civility and gentleness. Our feet avoid trampling upon flowers. No longer, as of old do our thieving fingers ransack the nests of birds. No longer do we use our horns to gore an enemy. . . . We are gentle and humane. We love the smell of leaves,

we love the mirroring pools of fountains. Therefore do not flee but be gracious to one of us and if he bears no gift to offer you, neither luscious grapes, nor flowery garlands, nor anything that ordinarily obtains a welcome for strangers, do not the less willingly receive his homage. Do not cause him pain at seeing that loveliness he adores greet him with a horror he does not merit and for which he would be beyond consolation."

The Faun's speech seemed to reassure Mme. de Blionne. Still kneeling, he continued gently and persuasively:

"Furthermore, am I a complete stranger to you? Perhaps were you to seek far back in the reaches of your memory you might rediscover my image there. Is it so unknown to you? Nay, does this suit of green velvet, these golden horns recall nothing? We do not always appear as suppliants to the hands of fair ladies. Sometimes a fervent gaiety animates us. Laughter sparkles in our eyes and music rules the cadence of our feet. I beheld a few of us caper about a dancing nymph one evening. She was fair, voluptuous and robed in silver, for she was a Nymph of the Fountains. Ah, happy vision of a happy night! It is thy memory I have pursued hither. Less fortunate than my brothers I was not

fettered by the triumphant Nymph, but I was present at their sport and if. . . . "

This allusion to the fete of Verduron caused Mme. de Blionne to blush; her cheeks were dyed a sudden crimson.

"Take care, take care, Faun too audacious!" she cried. "Beware your imprudence of entering this dangerous place! You will find nothing here you seek. The Nymph you speak of exists no longer. I do not know her and I am not certain that she ever existed except in dreams. Moreover, be warned that the owner of these trees and fountains is not favorably disposed toward Nymphs and Fauns. He does not like them to wander in the shadows of his trees or stare at their reflection in his pools. His gardens are dangerous. Fierce watch dogs guard the approaches. Beware that they run not upon you with their gaping jaws, their keen fangs. I already seem to hear them snarling at your heels, their baying rings in my ears. Flee, O Faun, while there is still time. Do not wait until they tear your legs, or rend you. What can I do to forbid you and who knows if I myself? . . ."

She paused. Both listened. The foliage rustled faintly in an invisible breeze as if it wished to echo the warning of Mme. de Blionne.

"May it please God," began the Faun, after a moment's silence, "that for the audacity of having entered here I may pay with a death that is within your power to render sweet and enviable! Sometimes Beauty takes no pity upon Love. Ah, that my lips might only kiss the hand that gestures me to go! Who knows if that favor might not change my aspect, might not permit me to regain my real appearance?"

And M. de Bréot, for it was indeed he, removed his green suit and the horned wig which masked him and rising, stepped toward Mme. de Blionne. Seeing her draw back at his approach, as if she now resolved to flee, he smiled sadly and said:

"Fear nothing, Madame. Do you believe I mean more harm than the wood-beast whose trappings I have just flung off? No, Madame, no! Had I wished to employ violence to obtain from you what I would lay down my life to gain, would I have not profited by my disguise? All that I required of this costume was that it lead me to your feet that I might tell you there exists someone among so many others, whose heart and mind are devoured by your loveliness."

Mme. de Blionne raised her hand in protest, but M. de Bréot continued in spite of her.

"I will not even tell my name, Madame. It is not a noble one and to you it is unknown. I love you, Madame, and all that matters to me is that you be known by me. Since I first saw you, your image has not faded from my eyes. It occupies my every thought. It is the never-failing companion of my desire. Indeed, I could conceal from you the passion that consumes me and not expose my heart to the despair of your refusals. Instead of telling you my passion I could have nourished it in secret and at least spared myself the pain of your indifference. I would then have had only my silence and my timidity to blame for my unhappiness. My memory would cherish only that charming vision, that treasure of my mind, which I would be at liberty to employ in my dreams as I desired. Your defenseless beauty would thus become the docile plaything of my nights. Couched naked at my side, it would have obeyed my every whim, for nothing protects ladies against the dreams of men. They must submit to unknown, inevitable lovers to whom they cannot deny imagined favors. Why should I not act like them, Madame? But I avow it is more cowardly to thus abuse even a beloved shadow, for I love you Madame, and what I desire of you is no light dream. It is you yourself, it is

that charming body, that delicious flesh fashioned for pleasure and for love."

The fountain murmured gently among the motionless trees while M. de Bréot uttered these words. When he had ended Mme. de Blionne remained silent for a moment.

"Love, Monsieur," said she finally, in a voice she strove to render confident, "but who told you that I wish to make love after the manner you desire? Ah, you men are ever the same, never are you aware of what your sincerest speeches have offensive in them. Nay! that love you offer demands a pleasure you can satisfy with almost anyone, a pleasure you demand without ever bothering to wonder if it does not degrade us in men's eyes. For if it at first appears to possess I do not know what of deliciousness and delight, it does not the less convince you afterwards that it is something that makes all women equal and common, so that you no longer see a reason to render us the gratitude you at first so stoutly promised us."

Mme. de Blionne becoming more animated as she spoke, continued:

"You do me the honor of cherishing a desire to which the language of our century gives the name of love. I hope indeed your yearnings are sincere

and even that they burn with true and powerful fire, but will they really endure? They were derived, Monsieur, from a fleeting impression fed by a vacant heart and by a lonesome mind, but who knows if they will survive the contact of our flesh, the kisses of our mouths? You first beheld me as a vague form that pleased you, and it is still this form that delights you and whose illusion you still seek to renew. Alas, Monsieur, are you certain that I resemble your memory of me? Do you not fear the test of reality? The bodies of women beneath the fabric of their robes or behind footlights are not always what they appear to be. What you demand of mine might be granted in a new form that might not be acceptable to you. What you call love sometimes endows our features with unforeseen expressions. Will mine please you or will you not grieve for that lost image you yourself created?"

She continued:

"I am certain, Monsieur, that you would not fail to admit that the illusion on which your desire is based has lent it a power that would not fail to please me and by which many women would feel honored. Ah, Monsieur, is desire so common as we think it is? I honestly believe we women are more delicate on this point than men imagine. You be-

lieve we yearn for those high transports from which many of us derive more vanity than we do pleasure. Our bodies are tender, they are fragile, Monsieur, and do not care as much as is believed, to be shaken to their roots by a pleasure that more often wearies than enraptures them. Is there not something in men's violence we endure rather than enjoy? This furious and ever-renewed passion terrifies as much as it delights us, and I know more than one woman who would prefer, in place of those gross tokens of affection, those gentler attentions, those more discreet caresses that confound and move us more than do that certainty you are ever forward in offering us. Thus I have often believed that love is something other than you make it out to be and I long to tell you, Monsieur, what I imagine it ought to be."

Mme. de Blionne lowered her eyes and continued in a lower voice as if she spoke only to herself, although she had turned toward M. de Bréot:

"In truth, is nothing sweeter than these carnal pleasures toward which most lovers direct their wooing and which they seem convinced are the highest pinnacle of their happiness and the ultimate goal of affection? If to attain their end they needed only to follow their mutual longing! But is it not rarely

so? For on the contrary how many difficulties and perils must they surmount! To what stratagems and subterfuges must they not have recourse! What circumventions and wiles must they not employ! What must they not hazard to achieve a brief moment of vulgar pleasure! If only it sufficed them to experience it but once! But, alas, we see them obliged to begin again and even this necessity of repeating the experience should warn us how light and fleeting it is, since it possesses none of those enduring qualities that last forever in the memory and which grow old with it, though never ceasing to be its constant joy. Ah, Monsieur, does it not seem vain that lovers of this kind should seek to shackle themselves with those embraces that bind but do not unite them? Such are the thoughts, Monsieur, which have always alienated me from this form of love and which have led me to believe there is another. Is it not love, Monsieur, to know that there is someone who dreams secretly and tenderly of us and whom we dream of too, someone who is present when he is not in body and from whom we are never absent, someone we understand and who understands us without there being any need for words, someone who is ourselves' other half and with whom we form but one being? What matters

time or distance then? If two beings have once experienced this emotion, is there not an eternal and indissoluble bond between them, a bond which alone is worthy of the name of love? It is only this love, Monsieur, which seems to me completely worthy of a delicate and passionate soul. It is he alone whose homage I will ever accept for I have often dreamed of him in solitude. I imagine him as one of respect, of tenderness and affection, and it is in this character, Monsieur, I wish to cherish your memory. Nothing would alleviate my sorrow and trouble more than to keep this image of you, which time will not efface from my heart. It will have its secret place there and will outshine that semblance in which you appeared a moment ago and whose silvan raiment announced a purpose that offended me and a design I wish well to forget."

Mme. de Blionne paused and gazed at M. de Bréot. She was pale and her lips trembled slightly. M. de Bréot remained silent as tears coursed from his eyes. He adored Mme. de Blionne standing before him. She had placed her foot on the horned wig. Behind her the fountain flung up sheaf-like jets of silvery mist. For a last time M. de Bréot believed he saw within it a dancing body that vanished in

a cloud of spray, as if the Nymph of those waters had disappeared forever. His mind reeled and in a dying voice he said:

"You wish, Madame, that I . . . . "

He did not complete his sentence. Mme. de Blionne had placed her two hands upon her breast as if to enclose the words he had just uttered. Her eyes closed, and with a deep sigh she murmured softly:

"Thank you."

Her eyes opened and gazed upon M. de Bréot, still kneeling before her. In a low voice she uttered this single word:

"Adieu!"

One of the roses of the bouquet she held, shed a petal in an empurpled odor.

* * *

Mme. de Blionne turned. She moved along the edge of the pool. M. de Bréot, motionless, watched her depart. Suddenly she turned back and uttered a feeble cry. Already M. de Bréot had embraced her. She hesitated and then abandoned herself to him weakly. M. de Bréot supported her in his arms. . . . There was a long silence. Leaves drifted down softly upon the hairy moss where the wig lay, its golden horns gleaming in a ray of the sun.

The fountain in a burst of strength flung up a blinding jet of water.

* * *

When at about four o'clock that evening, M. Hussonnois, finally recovered from his drunkenness, left the inn at Corventon he proceeded with a still unsteady step toward the chateau. But before entering it he decided to make a tour of the park to be certain that all was as it should be. Upon passing one of the low walls he was considerably astonished to observe that on one of the spikes surmounting it there fluttered a piece of green velvet as if someone had torn his clothes while leaping over the wall. M. Hussonnois shook his head and placed the piece in his pocket.

In front of the chateau M. Hussonnois met Mme. de Blionne who was returning from the gardens. Her evident air of distraction seemed to cause her to disregard the salutation of M. Hussonnois. This treatment impressing him as unusual, he felt the need of reflecting upon it in private. He therefore entered the open space where the great fountain was. The last ray of the sun pierced its gleaming jet. M. Hussonnois made a circuit of the pool. He easily imagined that its waters had become a rich wine for his head was still full of bacchic fancies.

Suddenly his foot struck something upon the ground and he stooped down to pick it up. It was a wig. It did not resemble those one commonly sees upon the heads of respectable folk and it impressed M. Hussonnois as being suspect and strange. Two tiny horns, blunt and gilded, protruded from its yellow hair and pricked crookedly through its mass of curls. M. Hussonnois, very much perplexed, balanced it upon his fist and turned it round thoughtfully.

M. Hussonnois was disquieted for under the horned wig he seemed to see a face that could be none other than that of the Count de Blionne.

END